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VAIN OBLATIONS

KATHARINE FULLERTON GEROULD

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BY

KATHARINE FULLERTON GEROULD

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1914

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TO

J. M. F. AND B. M. F.

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VAIN OBLATIONS

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VAIN OBLATIONS

AS I was with Saxe during the four most desperate weeks of his life, I think I may say that I knew him better than any one else. Those were also the four most articulate weeks, for they were a period of terrible inaction, spent on the decks of ocean steamships. Saxe was not much given to talking, but there was nothing else to do. No book that has ever been written could have held his attention for two minutes. I was with him, for that matter, off and on, until the end. What I have to tell I got partly from my own observation, partly from a good little woman at the Mission, partly from Saxe's letters, largely from his own lips, and partly from natives. But if I recorded it as it came, unassimilated, unchronologized—one fact often limping into camp six months after its own result—the story would be as unintelligible as the *quipus* of the Incas. It has taken me three years of steady staring to see the thing

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whole. I know more about it now—including Saxe—than Saxe ever knew. In point of fact, one of the most significant pieces of evidence did not come in until after his death. (I wish it clearly understood, by the way, that Saxe did not commit suicide.) But, more than that, I have been thinking for three years about Mary Bradford. I could tell you as much about what she suffered—the subtlety and the brutality of her ordeal—as if she were one of my own heroines. God forbid that I should ever think of Mary Bradford as "material": that I should analyze her, or dramatize her, or look at her with the artist's squint. If I tell her story, it is because I think it right that we should know what things can be. For the most part, we keep to our own continents: the cruel nations are the insensitive nations, and the squeamish races are kind. But Mary Bradford was the finest flower of New England; ten home-keeping generations only lay between her and the Quest of 1620. It is chronic hyperæsthesia simply to *be* New English; and the pure-bred New Englander had best stick to the euphemisms, the approximations, the reticences, of his own extraordinary villages. But Mary

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Bradford encountered all the physical realities of life in their crudest form, alone, in the obscene heart of Africa, with black faces thrust always between her and the sky. Some cynic may put in his belittling word to the effect that the New Englander has always counted physical suffering less than spiritual discomfort. The mental torture was not lacking in Mary Bradford's case. For over a year, the temptation to suicide must have been like a terrible thirst, death—any death—luring her like a rippling spring. I told Saxe one night in mid-Atlantic, to comfort him, that she would of course have killed herself if she saw no chance of escape.

Saxe laughed dryly. "That's the most damnable thing about it," he said. "Mary would think it mortal sin to kill herself. She would stick on as long as God chose to keep the breath in her body."

"Sin?" I queried rather stupidly.

"Yes, sin," he answered. "You don't know anything about it: you were brought up in Europe."

"But Saxe," I cried, "rather than—" I did not finish.

"You don't know anything about New England,"

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he said. "Damn your books! Missionaries face everything, and there's more than one kind of martyrdom. I hope she's dead. I rather think she is."

His voice was uneven, but with a meaningless unevenness like a boy's that is changing. There was no emotion in it. A week more of monotonous ploughing of the waves would just have broken him, I think; but he pulled himself together when he touched the soil of Africa. Something in him went out to meet the curse that hung low over the land in the tropic afternoon; and encountering the Antagonist, his eyes grew sane again. But with sanity came the reticence of battle. All that I know of Saxe's and Mary Bradford's early lives, I learned in those four weeks. I have made out some things about her, since then, that probably Saxe never knew. As I said, I have been thinking about Mary Bradford for three years, and it is no secret that to contemplate is, in the end, to know. The stigmata received by certain saints are, I take it, irrefutable proof of this. I do not pretend to carry upon me Mary Bradford's wounds; I do not even canonize her in my heart. But I seriously believe that she had, on the

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whole, the most bitter single experience ever undergone by woman; and much of the extraordinary horror of the adventure came from the very exquisiteness of the victim. I have often wondered if the Greek and Italian literatures that she knew so well offered her any mitigating memory of a woman more luckless than she. Except Jocasta, I positively cannot think of one; and Jocasta never lived. All of us have dreams of a market where we could sell our old lamps for new. How must not Mary Bradford have longed to change her humanities against mere foothold on the soil of America or Europe! But my preface is too long.

Now and then there is a story where all things work together for evil to the people involved; and these stories have, even for their protagonists, a horrible fascination. The story of Saxe and Mary Bradford is of this nature: a case, as it were, of double chicane. Everything happened precisely wrong. Almost anything happening differently would have given them a chance. If Mary Bradford had been born in Virginia, if her eyes had been blue instead of

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brown, if Ngawa had come back three hours sooner —Maupassant would have told it all from that point of view. But I am not trying to make literature out of it: it is as history that this story is important to me. Saxe had been engaged to Mary Bradford since her last year in college. Her mother had died when Mary was born, and the Reverend James Bradford had sailed, after his wife's death, for this little West African mission, leaving his child with a sister. Mary was brought up in America. When she was ten, her father came home for a year and took her back with him; but at twelve she was sent definitely home to be educated. James Bradford could not have conceived of depriving his child of Greek and trigonometry, and from school Mary went to college. She never, at any time, had any inclination to enter upon missionary work, though her religious faith was never at any moment in the smallest degree shaken. From her thirteenth year she had been an active and enthusiastic member of her father's denomination. She was a bit of a blue-stocking and occasionally somewhat ironic in speech. When I asked Saxe "if she had *no* faults," these were all he could think of.

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When she became engaged to Saxe, she stipulated that she should spend two winters with her father before marrying. The separation had never really parted Mary and her father; they had never lost the habit of each other. You see those sympathies sometimes between father and daughter: inarticulate, usually, like the speech of rock to rock, but absolutely indestructible. There was no question—I wish to emphasize this—about her love for Saxe. I had, for a time, her letters. It was a *grande passion*—to use the unhallowed historic phrase; twenty love stories of old Louisiana could have been melted up into it. Saxe, of course, consented to her going. During the second spring he was to go out, her father was to marry them at the Mission, and they were to return to America after a honeymoon in Italy. There is not one detail that does not, in the end, deepen the irony of it, if you look at it all long enough. Italy! All that romantic shimmer and tinkle against the savage fact that was. She went, and for six months seems to have busied herself happily enough with good little Mrs. Price at the Mission. She picked up a few dialects—she was always remarkably clever at

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languages. The Mission hangs above a tiny seaport —if you can call it a seaport, for there is a great reef a few miles out, and the infrequent steamships stop outside that and send passengers and letters in by boat. It is not one of the regular ports of call, and its chief significance lies in its position at the mouth of a large-ish river that winds inland for a few hundred miles, finishing no one knows exactly where. The natives for a hundred miles up-stream are fairly friendly and come down sometimes in big boats to trade; beyond that, the country runs into jungle and forest, and grows nastier and nastier. No one knows precisely about that region, and it lies just outside every one's sphere of influence; but there seems to be a network of unhealthy trails, a constant intertribal warfare, and an occasional raid by the precocious pupil of an Arab slave-trader. It is too far south for the big caravans, of course, but there is undoubtedly slave-stealing—though it is extremely difficult to learn anything definite about the country, as there are a dozen different tribes speaking entirely different languages, and each lying tortuously about all the rest. This is all that Saxe could

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tell me about that *hinterland* which he had never expected to be interested in.

In March, after Mary reached the Mission (she sailed in July, immediately after graduation), the chief of a small tribe some hundred miles up-stream descended in pomp to barter ivory for such treasure as oozes from European ships. Having seldom condescended to trade, he was disappointed at receiving so little for his ivory—a scanty lot of female tusks—and sought distraction and consolation within earshot of the Mission piano. He took especially kindly to the Reverend James Bradford, gravely inspected the school, and issued an invitation for Mr. Bradford to come up-stream and Christianize his tribe. The Mission had worked up and down the coast, as it could, but had never worked inland—more rumors than boats came down the waterway, which was not really a highroad and certainly led to nothing good. They lacked money for such an enterprise, and workers; but, being missionaries, never forgot that the river, and all who dwelt on its banks, belonged to God. It did not occur to James Bradford to refuse the call, which he took quite simply, as from brother

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to brother; it did not occur to Mary Bradford to let him go alone, or to her father to protest against her accompanying him. The patriarchal tinge is still perceptible in the New English conception of the family. Let me say, here, that there is no evidence that Ngawa himself ever broke faith with his white protégés. He was, like them, a victim of circumstances.

They were to go for six months. That would bring them to September. In September, three new workers were to come out to the Mission, and James Bradford hoped that two could then be permanently spared for the new Mission up-stream, which he already foresaw and yearned over. In September, he and Mary would return to the port; in late April, Saxe was coming out to marry Mary. They departed under the escort of Ngawa himself. Mr. Price promised to get a boat up to them in May, or at least a runner with letters.

Such details of the final catastrophe as Saxe was acquainted with were brought to the Mission by a native boy in September, just before the boat was to start up-stream (taking Adams and Jenks, the new recruits) to bring the Bradfords down. All reports

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had hitherto been favorable, if not astonishingly so. Ngawa had listened, and his heart seemed to incline to Mr. Bradford's teachings. Mary had started a little school for the babies. But Ngawa had no intention of compelling his people to embrace Christianity: he simply courteously permitted it to exist in his dominion. As talk of war came on, he was preoccupied with the affairs of his thatched state. The populace—they seem to have been a gentle crowd enough—grew apathetic to their apostles and deposited the commanded tribute somewhat listlessly before their huts. The medicine-men, of course, were hostile from the first, and, as the war drums beat in the forest and the men of the village gathered to sharpen their tufted spears, wild talk had undoubtedly not been wanting. The end had really been a bitter accident. Ngawa absented himself for three days to do some last exhorting and recruiting in his other villages. The attack that had not been expected for a week, at least, was made a few hours before his return. It became a raid rather than a battle; the village resisted the siege only a short time, and the invaders did what they would in the monstrous

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tropic dusk. Many of the native women were stabbed quickly; but the youngest ones, and Mary Bradford, were dragged off as captives. Mr. Bradford was killed in the beginning—not by the enemy, who were busy despatching Ngawa's subjects, but by Ngawa's chief medicine-man, who stole out of the shadows, slit his throat twice across, caught the blood in a cup, and then slid back into the darkness. The boy who brought them the story averred that he had seen it all, having been present, though somehow left out of the *mêlée*. The enemy, afraid of Ngawa's return, did not stop for the half-grown children. The white girl tore away, the boy said, and started back to her father, but the warrior who held her hit her on the head, so that she dropped, and then carried her off. Oh yes, he had seen it all quite well: he had climbed into a tree. The huts were all burning, and it was lighter than day. Ngawa came back that night, and, later, they destroyed utterly the villages of the other tribe, but they got back no captives. These had been killed at once, probably, or sold. Ngawa had gone back to the medicine-men.

Ngawa's people must have been gentler than most

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of their color, for the boy answered all the questions of the stricken missionaries before he asked to hear the piano.

This was absolutely all that Saxe knew, when he stumbled into my rooms and asked me to go out to Africa with him. The first cablegrams had simply announced the massacre, and it was only on receipt of letters from the Prices that Saxe learned about Mary and her horrible, shadowy chance of life. The Prices promised to cable any news, but it was unlikely that they would have any more. The boy who had brought them this story drifted down the coast, and for some months few boats came down the stream. Ngawa, they heard vaguely, had died, and his son reigned in his stead, a bitter disciple of unclean rites. Young Adams, in the pity of his heart, had gone the hundred miles to the village, but the people had evidently nothing to tell. The white priest was dead, and the white girl was gone. Their own captives were gone, too, and if they had been able to recover them would they not have done it? Undoubtedly, they were killed, but their enemies had been punished. No: they were faithful to their own

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gods. What had the white god done for his priest, or for Ngawa, who had listened—and died? Doubtless Adams would have been killed, if they had been defeated in the war, but he profited by the magnanimity of triumph. It was astonishing how little impression, except on Ngawa and one old medicine-man, James Bradford had made. Save that he had achieved martyrdom for himself, he might as well have stayed peacefully at the Mission. It is all, from first to last, a story of vain oblations. The people were inclined to forget that he had ever been there, but they registered their opinion that his white brother had better go back at once. Saxe's face, as Adams gave him this last news, was tense. He gripped the hand of the one white man who had visited that bitter scene, as if he would never let it go.

If Saxe had been delayed in America, it was only in order to arrange his affairs so that he could stay away indefinitely. He intended to follow Mary Bradford down those dim and bloody trails until at least he should have seen some witness of her death. Saxe was not rich, and his arrangements took him a certain length of time. We sailed from New York

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in March, and caught the African liner at Plymouth.

I will not enter upon the details of Saxe's activity during the next months, nor of the results he gained. It was a case where governments were of no use: the jungle that had swallowed up Mary Bradford acknowledged no suzerain across the seas. Saxe visited Ngawa's village, of course—"I am steel proof," he said, and I think he believed it. The story of those months is a senseless story of perishing lights and clues of twisted sand. We spent three months in rescuing the yellow widow of a Portuguese pearl-fisher, who had been captured by coast pirates and sold inland. When Saxe stood face to face with the "white woman" he had worked blindly to deliver, he reeled before her. "Tell him that I will marry him," said the woman with a noble gesture. She was forty, fat, and hideous. I mention the incident—which turned me quite sick, and in which, to this day, I can see nothing humorous—simply to show the maddening nature of our task. Even I had believed that this mysterious white woman was Mary Bradford. In that land of rumor and superstition and ignorance

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and cunning—above all, of savage indifference—anything might be true, and anything might be false. Three days after we had started off to find the Portuguese hag, a real clue came into the Mission. Our three months had been quite lost, for the Prices could get no word to us on our knight-errant task. Poor Saxe!

In September, Saxe, following this clue, which seemed to bear some real relation to the events of the year before, travelled solemnly, accompanied by a few natives only, into the heart of that *hinterland* which stood, to all the coast above and below the Mission, for treachery, mystery, and death. In October, he reached the village of the chief in question—a sun-smitten kraal, caught between high blue mountains and the nasty bit of jungle that separated them from one of the big waterways of Africa. Politics are largely a matter of geography, and his position was one of enviable independence, though he was to the neighboring kings on the scale of Andorra to France and Spain. He was a greedy old man, and the sight of several pounds of beads made him very communicative. Half of his information was bound,

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by African code, to be false, and Saxe had no means of knowing which half; but he owned to having purchased, a few months before, from a wandering trader, a slave woman of white blood. She had come high, he affirmed, cocking his eye at Saxe. But she was not Saxe's slave—Saxe had put it in that way in order to be remotely intelligible to the savage mind. Oh, no! she was the daughter of a Mandingo woman and an Arab. The trader had told him that: he had known the mother. Oh, no! it could not be Saxe's slave. However, he was willing, for a really good price, to consider selling her. Saxe refused to be discouraged. The clue had seemed to him trustworthy; and the story about the Mandingo woman might be pure invention—bravado, to raise the price.

He asked to see her. Oh, certainly; before purchasing he should see her. But meanwhile there was the official cheer to taste—*kava*, above all, inimitably mixed—and she should be fetched. Where was she? A young slave girl suggested sardonically that she was probably at her toilet. Since she had heard of the white man's coming—Saxe had tactfully sent a

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runner ahead of him—she had been smearing herself meticulously with ochre and other precious pigments. This was said with a sidelong glance at the chief: obviously, he distributed those precious pigments only to his favorites. Saxe said that from that moment his heart misgave him. He had been somehow sure that this woman was Mary. Why his heart should have misgiven him, I do not know; or what devil of stupidity put it into his head that this was the trick of a half-breed slave to make herself irresistible to a white man. It sounded to him, he said, like the inspiration that would naturally occur to the daughter of an Arab by a Mandingo woman. It has never sounded to me in the least like that. He said that he still believed it was Mary; but I fancy he believed it after the fashion of the doubter who shouts his creed a little louder. Of course there was something preposterous in the idea of Mary Bradford's making herself barbarically *chic* with ochre to greet the lover who might be coming to rescue her. But was not the whole thing preposterous to the point of incredibility? And Mary Bradford was not an ordinary woman—not the yellow widow of a

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Portuguese pearl-fisher. It has always seemed to me that poor Saxe ought to have realized that.

Saxe consumed *kava* until he could consume no more. Then the slave girl announced that the woman had been found. Saxe rose to his feet. He was stifling in the great hut, where all the chief councillors had joined them at their feast, where the reek from greased bodies seemed to mount visibly into the twilight of the great conical roof. His head was reeling, and his heart was beating weakly, crazily, against his ribs—"as if it wanted to come out," he said. His hands were ice-cold. He had just presence of mind enough to drag the black interpreter out with him, and to leave one of his own men inside to watch the stuff with which he proposed to pay. The chief and most of his councillors remained within.

Outside the hut, her back to the setting sun, stood the woman. Saxe had of course known that Mary would be dressed like a native; but this figure staggered him. She was half naked, after the fashion of the tribe, a long petticoat being her only garment. Undoubtedly her skin had been originally fair, Saxe

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said; but it was tanned to a deep brown—virtually bronzed. For that matter, there was hardly an inch of her that was not tattooed or painted. Some great design, crudely smeared in with thick strokes of ochre, covered her throat, shoulders, and breast. Over it were hung rows and rows of shells, the longest rows reaching to the top of the petticoat. Her face was oddly marred—uncivilized, you might say —by a large nose-ring, and a metal disk that was set in the lower lip, distending it. Forehead and cheeks were streaked with paint, and her straight black hair was dressed after the tribal fashion: stiffened with grease, braided with shells, puffed out with wooden rolls to enormous size. Her eyelids were painted red. That was not a habit of the tribe, and might point to an Arab tradition. The painted eyelids and the streaks that seemed to elongate the eyes themselves were Saxe's despair—he had counted on meeting the eyes of Mary Bradford. To his consternation, the woman stood absolutely silent, her eyes bent on the ground, her face in shadow. Even Saxe, who had no psychology, seems to have seen that Mary Bradford would, in that plight—if it *was*

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she—wait for him to speak first. But I think he had expected her at least to faint. Saxe looked at her long without speaking. He was trying, he said, to penetrate her detestable disguise, to find some vulnerable point where he could strike at her very heart, and know. In the midst of his bewilderment, he grew cool—cold, even. He gave himself orders (he told me afterward) as a general might send them from the rear. His tongue, his hands, his feet were very far off, but they obeyed punctiliously. My own opinion is that Saxe never, from the moment when he saw the woman, believed it to be Mary.

Her back, as I have said, was against the light. As the purchaser of a slave, he might well wish to see her more fully revealed. He gave the order through the interpreter: "Turn to the light." As she turned obediently and stood in profile against the scarlet west, he saw that her form was unshapely. On her back were a few scars, long since healed.

That moment was undoubtedly Hell for Saxe, in spite of the doubt upon him. But what must it have been for the impassible creature before him? Saxe saw that he must play the game alone. "Mary,"

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he said quietly in English, "I have come to take you home." In the circumstances, it was the stupidest thing he could have said; but the only thing he thought of was speaking in English. If it was Mary, those words, he thought, would reach her, would dispel her shame, or, if she were mad, pierce her madness.

She seemed not to have heard. "Bid her look me in the face," he said brutally to the interpreter. The order was repeated. She turned, raised her painted eyelids, and looked him straight in the eyes, with the apathetic look of the slave, the world over. "But were they Mary Bradford's eyes?" I cried to him, when he told me. "I don't know, damn you!" he said. "Mary had never looked at me like that—as if she didn't see me, and painted like a devil."

He seems to have felt—as far as I can define his feeling—that she was not Mary, but that perhaps he could bully her into being Mary. I do not know how else to explain his unconvinced but perfectly dogged insistence on her identity. He had, of course, been greatly shaken by the extraordinary appearance of the woman. Perhaps he was simply afraid it

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was she because it would be so terrible if it were, and was resolved not to shirk. Saxe, too, was a New Englander. At all events, he shouted his creed a little louder still. "You are treating me very badly, Mary. I am going in to buy you from the chief; and then you will listen to me."

The woman heard Saxe's voice and looked at the interpreter. Saxe, stupefied, repeated his speech to the negro, and the latter translated. At this, she threw up her arms and broke into guttural ejaculations. That painted form swayed grotesquely from side to side, Saxe said, and she tore the shells out of her hair, tearing the hair with them. Giving him one glance of devilish hatred, she ran to the chief's hut. Saxe followed. There was nothing else to do.

Then began, Saxe said, what for him was a horrible pantomime. He heard nothing of what was said, until afterward, for the interpreter could not keep up with the *prestissimo* of that scene; but one understood it without knowing. The woman grovelled at the chief's feet; she pointed to Saxe and wrung her hands. She was not Saxe's slave, and evidently did not wish to be. The other women drew near to lis-

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ten, being, clearly, personally interested in the outcome. The chief was, as I have said, avaricious. He looked longingly at the shining heaps of beads, the bolts of scarlet cloth, above all, the Remington rifles. Yet it was clear that he had not wholly outgrown his sluggish *penchant* for the woman who clung to him. It does not often happen, for that matter, that a petty chief in the remote interior can count a white woman—even a half-breed—among his slaves; and the male savage has an instinct for mating above him. The woman saw whither the avaricious eye wandered. She rose from the ground, she stood between him and the treasures, she bent over him and murmured to him, she pointed to her own distorted form. . . . The little slave girl scowled, and the chief's eye gleamed. What at first had seemed a possible detriment, now showed as an advantage. "That was true," he exclaimed. "Before long she would bring him a warrior son or a girl he could sell for many cows. Let the white man wait." Saxe stamped his foot. Not one day would he wait: the bargain should be completed then. He told me afterward that, after seeing her with the chief, he was

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absolutely convinced that the woman they were cheapening was the half-breed Arab they said she was; and the general in the rear of the battle wondered dully what he should do with her. But the woman had thrust herself cunningly beneath the chief's very feet, had twined her arms about his ankles, had welded herself to him like a footstool that he could not shake off. Over the chief's thick features, in the torch light (for night was falling outside), into his avaricious eyes, crept a swinish gleam. Let the white man wait until to-morrow. Night was falling; it was time to sleep. By the sunlight they could deal better. The woman panted heavily beneath his feet, never loosing her hold. The young slave girl looked down at her with unconcealed malignity. Saxe found himself forced to retire from the royal hut—sleeping-chamber, banqueting-hall, audience-room in one. He said that all he thought of, as he stumbled out, was the idiotic figure he should make at the Mission as the owner of an Arab-Mandingo woman. It was worse than the yellow Portuguese.

He was conducted to his tent. The interpreter

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confirmed there all that Saxe had divined. Let it be said now that Saxe had one clear inspiration. Before leaving the hut, he had turned and spoken to the woman who was fawning on the wretched negro. "Mary," he said, "if you ask me to, I will shoot you straight through the heart." The woman had snarled unintelligibly at the sound of his voice, and had redoubled her caresses. Can you blame Saxe for having doubted? Remember that she had not for one moment given any sign of being Mary Bradford; remember that he had no proof that it was Mary Bradford. "Had you no intuition of her?" asked young Adams, later, at the Mission. "Intuition!" cried Saxe. "There wasn't a feature of Mary Bradford there: she was a loathsome horror." Let those who cannot believe in Saxe's failure to recognize her, reflect for an instant on all that is contained in that literal statement. Have you never failed, after a few years of separation, to recognize some one: some one whose face had not been subjected to barbaric decoration and disfigurement, not even to three years of the African sun; who, living all the while in the same quiet street, had merely passed for a time

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under the skilful transforming hands of sorrow? I have seen Mary Bradford's photograph, and was told at the same time that the not very striking face depended for its individuality on the expression of eyes and mouth. But painted eyes . . . and a lip-ring? She was undoubtedly, as Saxe said, "a loathsome horror"; and a loathsome horror who gave no sign. I firmly believe that she was not recognizable to the eye. Saxe's only chance would have lain in divination; in being able to say unerringly of the woman he loved: "Thus, or thus, in given circumstances, would she behave." Such knowledge of Mary Bradford could never have been easy to any man. In my opinion, no one can blame him for doubting. The magnificence of the performance was almost outside the realm of possibility. I asked Saxe once if Mary Bradford had been good at acting. He had never seen her do but one part: she had done that extremely well. And the part? Beatrice, in *Much Ado*. Beatrice!

The strain of it had told on Saxe, and he slept that night. But it is only fair to say that, before he slept, he had quite made up his mind that he was as far

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away from Mary Bradford as he had ever been. It is not to be wondered at. Only a man who had grasped Mary Bradford's idea—it has taken me three years to do that, entirely—could have believed that she would let Saxe go out baffled from the hut in which she deliberately chose to stay with her half-drunk, wholly vile captor. Women who could have done all the rest, would have turned at Saxe's offer of a kindly shot through the heart. But Mary Bradford was great. She was also infinitely wronged by Fate. It is all wanton, wanton—to the very last: all, that is, except her own part, which was sublimely reasoned.

Saxe slept, I say; and at dawn woke to his problem. The intelligence that works for us while we sleep waked him into the conviction that he must, at any cost, buy the woman. He said that, as he strode over to the chief's hut, he was thinking only of what price he ought to put on the child that would be such a fantastic mixture of breeds. He did not want the woman, but he felt that the purchase was inevitable. This, I am convinced, was only the New English leaven working him up to martyrdom.

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It would be unmitigatedly dreadful to have the woman on his hands, and therefore he ought probably to buy her.

The chief greeted him with temper, and soon Saxe learned why. The woman had left the hut before dawn, taking with her her master's largest knife. She was found later in her own little hovel, dead, with a clean stab to her heart. Suicide is virtually unknown among savages, and the village was astir. Saxe asked to see the body at once, but that, it seems, was not etiquette: he had to wait until it was prepared for burial. For an instant, he said, he thought of bargaining for the body, but forebore. He had a difficult return journey to make, and the point was, after all, to see it. When they permitted him to enter the hut, the face had been piously disfigured beyond recognition. He told me that he lifted the tattooed hand and kissed it: he did not know why. It was clear that if the woman had—preposterously—been Mary, she would not have wished it; and if she were the other, it was almost indecent. But he could not help it. This impulse of his seems to have been his only recognition of Mary Bradford.

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In life and in death, she suppressed every sign of herself with consummate art.

We were a fevered group that waited for Saxe day after day at the Mission; and he seemed to have been gone an intolerably long time. The broken leg that had kept me from going with him was almost well when he returned. Yet he had taken the shortest way back. It was also the unhealthiest. He said that he had heard war rumors that made him avoid the more frequented trail, but I fancy he rather hoped that the swamps he clung to would give him fever. In that sense—and in that sense only—Saxe could perhaps be said to have committed suicide. He stumbled into the Mission dining-room at noon one day. "And Mary?" we all cried, rising. "Oh, did you expect to see Mary?" he asked politely, but with evident astonishment.

We got him to bed at once. After the days of delirium were over, he told his story quite simply. It was pitifully short. The concrete facts seemed to be perfectly clear in his mind, and he gave them spontaneously; but what he himself had felt during that dramatic hour, I learned only by close questioning.

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He died suddenly, when he was apparently convalescent. The year he had been through had simply killed resiliency in him and he went down at the last as stupidly as a ninepin. I cannot imagine the source of the rumor that he had killed himself, unless it was some person who thought he ought to have done so. He started, at the end, to speak to me: "If Mary ever—" He never got beyond the three words; they showed sufficiently, however, that he was considering the possibility of Mary Bradford's being discovered after his death. He may have been wandering a little at the last; but, in my opinion, Saxe had never believed, even after the suicide, that the woman he had seen had been his betrothed.

Some weeks after Saxe's death, we received incontrovertible proof—if testimony is ever incontrovertible—that it had indeed been she. We had been surrounded for a year by a hideous jungle—blind, hostile, impenetrable. Now out of that jungle stalked a simple fact. One of the native girls who had been taken captive with Mary Bradford returned at length to her own tribe. She had shared Mary's fortunes, as it happened, almost to the last; then the

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chief who had bought them both sold her, and by the successive chances of purchase, raid, and battle she had reached her own people. It was hardly more than crawling home to die; but she managed to send word by one of her kinsmen to the white people down the river. Apparently she and Mary had promised each other to report if either should ever reach friends again. Her message was pitifully meagre: Mary had talked little in those wild months; and after she had seen that they were too well watched to escape, she had talked not at all. But the two had evidently clung together—an extraordinary tie, which was the last Mary Bradford was to know of friendship. The burden of the native's report was that the white girl was the favorite of a chief who gave her much finery. The dying woman seems to have thought it would set Mary Bradford's friends at rest—her kinsman, I remember, said that he had good news for us. The news was no news to me—I had been thinking; but I was glad that Saxe had died before he could hear it. Even the comfort of knowing that Mary was surely dead would never have made up to him for the ironic memory of the last hour he

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had spent with her. Besides, Saxe would never have understood.

I should probably never have touched this chapter of history with a public pen, if I had not heard a woman say, a few months since, that she thought Mary Bradford's conduct indelicate. Had the woman not said it to me directly, I should not have believed, even at my cynical age, that such a thing could be said. I greatly regret, myself, that the facts were ever told: they should have been buried in Africa with Saxe. But the Prices returned to America not long after it all happened, and apparently could not refrain from talking. Even so, I should have let Mary Bradford's legend alone, forever, had I not learned that she could be misjudged.

Consider dispassionately the elements of her situation; and tell me who has ever been so tortured. Physically unable to escape by flight, morally incapable, as you might say, of escaping by death—for there can be no doubt that, difficult as suicide would have been to a guarded captive, she could have found some poisonous root, courted the bite of some serpent, snatched for one instant some

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pointed weapon; and that she was deterred, as Saxe said, by the simple belief that to take one's life was the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, the Comforter—she could but take what came. As a high-priced chattel, she was probably not, for the most part, ill-treated—save for the tattooing, which was not cruelly intended. The few scars that Saxe noted doubtless bore witness to her protest against the utmost bitterness of slavery, some sudden saint-like frenzy with which she opposed profanation. She may have wondered why God chose so to degrade her: her conduct with Saxe shows beyond a doubt how she rated her degradation. She made not one attempt to dignify or to defend her afflicted body. Her soul despised it: trampled it under foot.

What Mary Bradford suffered before Saxe came we cannot know, but the measure of it lies, I think, in the resolution she took (if we believe the jealous slave girl) when she heard of the white man's approach. She must have divined Saxe, leagues away, as he was unable to divine her, face to face. Her one intent was to deceive him, to steep her-

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self in unrecognizable savagery. If Mary Bradford had conceived of any rôle possible for herself in her own world, she would not have created her great part. If she had felt herself fit even to care for lepers at Molokai, she would have washed away her paint and fallen at his feet. It is perfectly evident that she considered herself fit for nothing in life—hardly for death. Her hope was clearly that Saxe should not know her. I do not believe that it was pride. If there had been any pride left in Mary Bradford's heart, she could not have stood quietly ("apathetically," was his word!) before Saxe in the flare of the dying sun. It was not to save anything of hers that she went through her comedy, but only to save a little merciful blindness for Saxe himself. He undoubtedly made it as hard as possible for her. I am inclined to think that if he had gone away at once, she would be living still—mothering her half-breed child, teaching it secretly the fear of God. When she saw that all Saxe's bewilderment still left him with the firm determination to buy her—to take her away and study her at his leisure—she conceived her magnificent *chute de rideau.*

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When she went into the hut, she had decided, for Saxe's sake, to die. Mary Bradford grovelling at the feet of the drunken chief will always seem to me one of the most remarkable figures in history: I should never have mentioned Jocasta in the same breath with her. Only Christianity can give us tragedy like that. How must she not have longed, at Saxe's offer of a kindly shot through the heart, to turn, to fling herself at his feet, to cry out his name, once. She "redoubled her caresses," Saxe said! Has any man ever been so loved, do you think? For the sake of bestowing upon him that healing doubt, she let him go, she put off death, she spent her last night on earth not fifty yards from him, in the hut of a savage, that she might have, before dawn, the means of committing the unpardonable sin. Note that she did not commit suicide until she had made it perfectly plausible—from the point of view of the Arab-Mandingo woman. *She proved to him that it was not she.* She gauged Saxe perfectly. Nothing but some such evidence as later we received—perhaps not even that—would ever have made Saxe believe that Mary Bradford, with him by her side, had clung

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to that vile savage. Even Mary Bradford—whose soul must have been, by that time, far away from her body, a mere voice in her own ears, a remote counsellor to hands and feet—could not have done that, had she not intended to die. But remember that up to that day she had lived rather than rank herself with the "violenti contro se stessi." We can simply say that Mary Bradford chose the chance of Hell for the sake of sparing Saxe pain. The fact that you or I—I pass over the lady who thinks her indelicate; does she think, I wonder, that it would have been delicate for Mary Bradford to accompany Saxe back to civilization?—may believe her to be one of the saints, has nothing to do with what she thought. Mary Bradford came of a race that for many generations believed in predestination; but she herself believed in free will. Dreadful as it is to be foredamned, it is worse to have damned yourself. She had not even the cold comfort of Calvinism. I said that I understood Mary Bradford. I am not sure that it would not have taken a Spanish saint of the sixteenth century really to understand her. Sixteenth-century Spain is the

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only thing I know of that is in the least like New England.

I am not trying to make out a "case" for Mary Bradford; and I sincerely hope that the lady who thinks her indelicate will never read these pages. For most people, the facts will suffice, and I have no desire to interpret them for the others. You have only to meditate for a little on the ironic and tragic reflections of a hundred kinds that must have surged through Mary Bradford's brain, to be swept away, yourself, on the horrid current. Do I need, for example, to point out the difficulty—to use a word that I think the lady I have cited would approve—of merely meeting the man she adored, face to face? For never doubt that those souls who live least by the flesh feel themselves most defiled by its defilement. No, you have only to explore Mary Bradford's tragedy for yourself. It will take you three years, perhaps, as it has taken me, to penetrate the last recesses. And if you are tempted for a moment to think of her as mad, or *exaltée*, reflect on how completely she understood Saxe. I am only half a New Englander; and I confess that, though I rev-

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erence her heroism, I am even more humble before her intelligence. It is no blame to Saxe that he stumbled out of the chief's hut, completely her dupe. Poor Saxe! But the vivid vision of that scene leaves *Phèdre* tasteless to me. As I say, I am only half a New Englander. . . .

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THE MANGO-SEED

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THE MANGO-SEED

THE two young men looked at each other rather helplessly. Then "Marty" Martin drew a few ragged words over his helplessness. "I'm sorry, Peter—really, awfully. I'll be back in an hour. And do buck up. But you have bucked up, you really have. You look ever so much better than you did when we went to lunch. And I'll be back. Oh, you can depend on me." He drifted off through the door. His muscles were tense with haste, but he fingered chairs and tables as he went—as if trying to put clogs of decency on feet indecorously winged. Even so, he was soon out of sight, and Peter Wayne was alone.

"There's no point in saying it isn't rum, because it is," he murmured to himself. "And *here*," he added, looking about. There was no moral support in those crimson walls, those great pier-glasses, those insignificant writing-tables with red-shaded electric lights, those uncomfortable tapestried armchairs. It wasn't

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the setting to help you through a crisis. He was in the quietest corner of the most essentially respectable hotel in New York. There were plenty of them—scores—that were incidentally respectable; but at the St. Justin respectability had been cherished through years for its own sake, as more important than the register, the cuisine, or the unimpeachable location that no metropolitan progress could render inconvenient. As a very young bachelor with virtually no family ties, he was not familiar with the St. Justin. It wasn't a place where you would expect to get the kind of thing his kind of human being wanted. He couldn't, for example, have induced Marty to lunch there. They had lunched at Plon's. It was a hotel where you might be perfectly sure your grandparents had stopped. It was natural that his mother should have selected it for their meeting, as she hadn't been in America for well over twenty years. But there was less backing than he had expected, somehow.

Sitting uncomfortably in one of the corners by a writing-table (his back to the window so that the familiar streets shouldn't lure him too much to flight),

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he took the privilege of the consciously crucial moment. He reviewed his life. It was so very short, after all, that it was easily reviewed. He was only a few months out of the university, and he was just twenty-two. The insoluble was there to the point of being either romantic or absurd, he didn't know which. He had what so many young people long for in vain, a mystery. He had amused himself occasionally with monstrous hypotheses. But what real account could he give of himself? What account, that is, of the sort that Marty Martin and his like had by heart before they could spell? The most that he knew about his parents—except that they were alive and in the tropics—was that they banked in Honolulu and had some natural hold or other on Marty Martin's uncle. Marty Martin's uncle had picked out Peter's school and his college for him, and was telegraphed for when Peter had appendicitis. That was as near the parental relation as anything he had known from experience. Lonely? Well, any fellow was lonely when the other fellows all went trooping home for holidays; but loneliness he had always frankly diagnosed as three-quarters pride. The fellows were al-

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ways glad to get back to school or college, he noticed. In any case, he had stopped thinking about it much—his plight. That saved his dignity. What he sat now vaguely dreading was the immense, the cataclysmic downfall of his dignity. He tried to put the facts to himself so simply that they should be as reassuring as a primer. Ollendorf, he had once complained to a teacher, would take the zest out of a murder, the sense out of a scandal. Tragedy was a verbal matter. Put a crime into any foreign language, and it sounded like a laundry list. He would try, as it were, to find the French for his situation.

"Oh, rot!" he began, taking his own advice quite seriously. "It isn't so Sudermannish as all that. My father and my mother chose to go to the tropics to live, a year after I was born. They did not take me with them. They have never sent for me; but they have supported me; they have written to me occasionally; they have got Marty Martin's uncle to keep me out of the hands of the S. P. C. C., and trained me generally to do without them. I've never been invited to go to Tahiti. And Tahiti isn't like London —if you know any one there, you can't go without an

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invitation. They can't have turned against me, when I was eleven months old, on account of my vices. I've kept pretty jolly and managed to regularize the situation with my friends. Now my mother has written that she's coming to America to see me. Indeed, she has actually come. I wasn't allowed to meet her at a steamer, decently. I have to meet her here—here." (He looked gloomily around at the conventional walls.) "Yet she doesn't seem to be staying here. I don't know whether she will want tea, or where to take her to dinner. I don't know her when I see her. I don't know—oh, hang it, I don't know anything! And if I could funk it, like Marty, I would. But what can you do when a lady takes the trouble to bring you into the world? If it had been my father, now, I wouldn't—I positively wouldn't—have consented to meet him. It's—it's no way to treat a fellow."

His vain attempt at Ollendorfian flatness broke down: the mere facts seemed so very much against him. He had often complained to Marty Martin that it was dashed awkward, this being the only original changeling; but, in point of fact, he had never been so uncomfortable in his life as now, at the prospect

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of playing the authentic filial rôle. "I'll make her dine here," he muttered. He could think of nothing worse without being actually disrespectful. An old lady in a gray shawl walked slowly down the hall past the door, and it suddenly struck him that his mother would perhaps like to dine at the St. Justin. "I ought to have cabled to ask what color *her* shawl would be," he began, in a flippant whisper, to himself. The flippant whisper stopped. He was much too genuinely nervous to be flippant any longer without an audience. At the same time, he found himself wondering—oh, insincerely, theatrically, rhetorically wondering—why he had not bought an etiquette book. There was something—well, to be honest, something like an extra gland in his throat, something like a knot in his healthy young nerves—that kept him from putting the question to himself audibly. "If she cries—" he reflected, with anticipatory vindictiveness. What he really meant was: "If she makes me so much as sniff." For your mother was really the one person in the world who had you necessarily at a disadvantage. Even if you hadn't the habit of her, you couldn't count on yourself for ret-

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icence. You might be as bored as possible, but that wouldn't save you. There might be treacheries of the flesh, disloyalties of the cuticle—all manner of reversions to embryonic helplessness. She somehow had your nerves, your physical equilibrium, at her mercy. Old Stein, prodding at you with instruments in the psychological laboratory, was a mere joke in comparison. Even the most deceived, the most docile and voluble student ended respectably in a card catalogue. Peter felt suddenly an immense tenderness for the decencies, the unrealities of "science." But to meet your mother in conditions like these was the real thing: the naked horror of revelation. "It's literature," thought Peter to himself, "and what is literature but just the very worst life can do?" He came back to his familiar conclusive summary. It *was* rum.

The next quarter of an hour passed more mercifully. The mere empty lapse of time helped him, half duped him into thinking that the scene might not come off at all. It was foolish to be there ahead of time, but what could a man in his predicament do, or pretend to do, between luncheon and an interview like that? They had had, he and Marty, a civilized

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meal at Plon's; but he had not been hungry, and to smoke among the stunted box-trees afterward had been—well, impossible. They had got to the St. Justin ridiculously early, and then Marty had bolted. Peter didn't bear him any grudge for that; of course it was perfectly proper for Marty to bolt. It would have been worse, he began to think, to face her first before a witness.

By this time he had accepted the smallest writing-room of the St. Justin as the predestined scene of the great encounter; accepted it as, perhaps divinely, perhaps diabolically, but at all events supernaturally, appointed. These walls had been decorated by dead people to be unsympathetic and grossly unfit witnesses of Peter Wayne's embarrassment. To that extent they belonged to him. The sudden superstition was genuine; so genuine that he found himself resenting a bit of chatter that sprang up outside the door and, even more, the immediate quick entrance into the writing-room of one of the chatterers. Why hadn't his mother given him an appointment in her own sitting-room, at her own hotel—whatever that might be? He didn't know; he knew nothing of her since

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the wireless message that had made the appointment; and of course since she was managing the thing that way, he hadn't even tried to meet her at her steamer, though it had actually docked at some unearthly hour that morning. But she was likely to pay, too, for her perversity, since the lady who had just come in and had sat down rather aimlessly at one of the tables would probably annoy her as much as she did him. He had owned—or pretended?—to Marty Martin a furtive curiosity as to this mother of his, whom he had virtually never seen, of whom he hadn't so much as a photograph. Now something quite different stirred within him: the instinct to protect her against anything she would not like. He suddenly saw her frail and weary and overwrought and quite old—pathetically, not ironically, like the little old lady who had hobbled past the door—and he resented any detail that might crown her long effort at reunion with an extra thorn. He was sure she would hate this other woman's being there—the younger woman who had just come in, and sat down so nonchalantly.

This lady obviously intended to stop long enough

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for their discomfiture, since—just here he got up and looked at his watch as he did so—it lacked scarce two minutes of the appointed hour. He looked at the intruder a little impatiently. She wasn't writing. Perhaps he could suggest, by some flicker of expression, some implication of gesture, that he wasn't there in that ridiculous galley for nothing, and still less there for casual company. She was slim and smartly veiled and outrageously made up. That was all he saw out of the corner of his eye, but it was enough to make him feel that she had no such rights at the St. Justin as a reunited mother and child. She wasn't waiting for a parent, he knew; only for some frivolous friend or other. He was so nervous as to wonder if there were any conceivable way in which one could ask her to go into one of the other rooms. A depopulated chain of them stretched down the corridor. He threw another glance at her. She was well dressed. Peter, though he might know as little as a poodle about the nature of the current fashion, could, like most men, pounce unerringly on the unfashionable. Her exuberance wasn't a matter of gewgaws; it was all in the meretricious harmonies of her features and

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complexion. And yet—Peter caught himself away from staring, as he passed her, but one glance was enough to show him that—it was a perfectly honest mask; her paint and powder were as respectable as blue glasses. Again he knew it unerringly. He was glad to recognize it. For at that moment he became so nervous that he did, without a qualm, the most preposterous thing he had ever done, even at two and twenty.

His mother was imminent; he knew it in a hundred ways. The atmosphere was charged with more than the mere prospect, was charged with the actual certainty of her. He found that he was going to put it to the lady who sat there. He stood in the door of the writing-room and looked down the dark hall. It was empty, save for a woman who sat humbly near, bonneted, veiled, faithfully clasping some kind of bag—obviously a servant. Remembering the bit of chatter, he fancied it the maid of the intruding lady. No one else was in sight. Yet somehow he knew that his mother would be on time: the crispness of her earlier cablegrams promised it. The lady really must go elsewhere, and the maid—old and "colored" and

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manifestly respectable—must move down the hall and sit outside another door. He went back, and this time walked straight across to the stranger.

"Will you pardon me, madam" ("madam" was a deplorable word, but the powder somehow demanded an extravagant formality), "if I speak to you, to ask you something very odd?"

She stared at him through her fantastically patterned veil.

"I have been put in the position of having to meet an elderly lady—a near relative—here for a more or less intimate conversation. I don't think she realized, in making the appointment, how little privacy you have a right to in a hotel. It is very long since she has been in a great city. Will you pardon the—the really unpardonable—liberty of my asking if you are likely to be here much longer? I mean—ought I to arrange to take her elsewhere in the hotel when she comes? She will be here in a moment."

It was a dreadful thing to have had to do, and, if he judged by what the veil showed of the lady's face, it couldn't have been worse done. She looked dismayed. Peter was angry: so angry that he managed

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to stop just where he had stationed himself before her; so angry that he didn't deprecate, that he simply set his teeth and waited. There was nothing he could do now, he felt, to convince her that she hadn't been insulted.

She lifted her veil ever so little, just freeing her lips, slightly constricted by its tight-drawn mesh. As she did so, she both rose and spoke.

"Aren't you Peter Wayne?"

He bowed, relieved. If they had a ground of acquaintance, he could perhaps cover it all up, make it plausible, get rid of her on some dishonest, hilarious pretext. "I am." He waited; there was no use in pretending that he remembered her.

The veil was lifted farther, then a hand was laid on his shoulder and a voice sounded in his astonished ears. "Turn to the light, my son, and let me look at you. I've not had a photograph, you remember, since you were a child."

Even as he faced the light, he was saying to himself that it was rummer than ever; but it was rummest when he turned for his legitimate look at her. She was older than he had assumed the strange lady to

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be; but she was a long way from the little old lady in the gray shawl. This was his mother, and it was over —he felt it as those sinking for the third time may feel. In another instant he saw his mistake. He had been pulled up out of the surge into the terrible air— this was his mother, and it had just begun! He mastered his breath—his breath that under the water had been playing tricks with him. He looked her over, searching stare for searching stare. Her fair hair had lost what must once have been a golden lustre, but it was carefully, elaborately arranged, waved, curled, braided. It was as fashionable as her clothes. The white mask of powder left clear the contour of the fine, thin nose but cloaked the subtler modellings of the face. The blue eyes, idle yet intent, looked at him from behind it; below them it was rent, once, by the scarlet stab of the mouth. Peter remembered vaguely having heard that the tropical sun necessitated such protection. It was the northern dimness and drizzle that turned make-up into a moral question. Even for the *grands boulevards*, to be sure, Mrs. Wayne's make-up would have been overdone. This was the chief result of his searching stare.

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She wasn't like one's mother at all, confound it!—not like any one's mother. He would have been glad of a little more sophistication than even at wise two-and-twenty he was conscious of possessing.

"Your maid?" he asked, remembering the figure outside the door.

"Oh, yes; my old Frances. She recalls you as a baby. She'll want to see you. You must speak to her before we go."

"But you're not going——"

"I find I'd better get off to-night. I've learned since landing, that if I do, I can just get a boat at Vancouver. It's not as if I had any business to do. You'll take me to dinner somewhere—some restaurant. I don't like hotels."

"But—you don't mean you've come for only twenty-four hours—across all that?"

The straight red mouth elongated itself into a smile. "If there weren't so much of it to cross, I could, perhaps, stay longer. I came only to say one or two things."

She spoke as if she had run up from her country place for the day. Peter suddenly revolted against

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this careless treatment of his plight. He was glad if his prayers had succeeded in averting tragedy. At the same time, he didn't intend to be turned into farce. He hadn't let himself in for all this only to be shirked as he had been shirked for more than twenty years. He meant to know things, hang it! He had been afraid of a scene; afraid of twenty years' emotion expressed in an hour; of a creation of human ties as violent and sudden as the growth of the tree from the mango-seed in the fakir's hands. "In ten minutes you eat the ripe mango," a globe-trotting friend had told him. If he hadn't the fakir's miracle to fear, well and good; but neither was he going to suffer the other extreme, the complete dehumanizing of the experience. After all, she was his mother, hang it! If she wasn't going to make him pay—well, he would make her pay. Somebody had to get something out of so preposterous a situation. He leaned forward.

"Things you couldn't write? Or have you just funked it, on the way?"

"Funked it?" Her vocabulary apparently did not hold the word.

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"I mean—oh, I mean, let us talk straight. You've let it all go for more than twenty years. Now you take it all up again. I'm a gentleman, I hope. I didn't bolt, though you can bet I wanted to. It would have been easier never to have seen you at all."

"You've never wanted to see your mother?"

Peter looked out of the window into the familiar street. If it hadn't been for the utter detachment of her tone, he would have felt that she was hitting below the belt.

"What do you take me for? I've nearly died of—well, call it interest, more times than I can count up. No little boy likes to have no mother; likes to have his mother care nothing for him. But I've grown perfectly used to it. And I know—I *know* now, mind you—that you don't care. Well, it may not be what I should have chosen, but at least it lets me out. It's too late, now, to make me care."

It was by no means the whole truth. But it was what he had been trying, and in vain, to say to himself an hour since about it all. There was some triumph in being able to say it now to her.

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Her blue eyes turned on him a stranger's sudden kindness. "Were those years bad, Peter? I thought they'd be less bad if you began them very young. You see, they had to begin some time."

"Oh, they began—and they lasted. Now, they're not bad at all. So why rake it all up now?"

If she had been little and old and shaking, he couldn't have pressed the question, he knew. The powdered cheeks, the elaborate hair, the vermilion lips gave him a kind of sanction. There was a pitiful way of wearing rouge, no doubt; this wasn't pitiful in the least. He didn't know what she looked like underneath the mask, but he could almost have sworn she didn't need it.

"I'm not trying to do that. If I've come so late, it's because I feel quite sure that it's too late to undo any of it. I am not trying"—her brilliant, dyed smile was extraordinarily little in the maternal tradition —"to get a single claw into you. I've come to pay damages, Peter, not to claim them. But you must be very, very, very polite to me. I'm not used to anything else. And America rather frightens me."

"I don't want to be anything but polite," mur-

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mured Peter, abashed. "And the freer you really are, the more it's up to you to play the game, don't you think?"

She smiled vaguely, and he saw at once that she belonged to the generation that preceded slangy paradox. She might almost have worn a fluffy gray shawl.

"I am sure you don't wish to be anything but polite," she brought out, still vaguely. "But—I've odd things to say, and I've come a long way to say them; and you, my son, must listen."

"It's what I'm here for."

"*Evidemment.* How much has Spencer Martin told you?"

"Old Martin? Nothing at all, ever—except the figure of my allowance."

"Not why we first went to Hawaii?"

"Good Lord, no! I might have been a foundling."

"You didn't ask?" She had taken off her gray glove; and pushed her veil up farther on her forehead, with beautiful white fingers.

"No," answered Peter curtly. "A fellow wouldn't ask. You can see that."

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She seemed to muse. "He would have told you that, I think, if you had. There was no reason why you shouldn't know."

"I naturally supposed, if there was no reason why I shouldn't know, you'd have seen to it that I was told."

"So you thought there was something disgraceful —something that drove us out of America?"

"It has occurred to me. But I never let myself worry about it. And old Martin himself was a kind of proof that there wasn't."

"There wasn't." She echoed his words in a disdainful, emphatically affirmative tone. "No, Peter, not that." She paused for a moment, staring out into the gray street. "These women are very ugly, aren't they?" she asked irrelevantly. "On the boat, they were horrors. And they jerked about so—*did* so many things. Do the men like them that way?" Her tone was desultory.

"I suppose so." He felt a mischievous desire to tell her how little the men he knew would probably like them *her* way; but, in fact, the slow conviction was encroaching on his mind—not so much pene-

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trating it as fluidically enwrapping it—that she was compounded of many graces. Her gestures, for example: they were all slow, and each showed off something, if only, for an instant, some lesser, some negligible contour. She had the air of not having stirred a limb or a feature for years, except to please, and of being now in the practice infallible. She was very feminine—no, hang it! that dairymaid word wouldn't do. (Peter had been, in college, the proudest product of his several "theme-courses," and the quest of the epithet was not unknown to him.) She was very simple and very sophisticated. He had to leave it at that.

"I'll tell you about our leaving America. You ought to have known long since. And yet—perhaps it was better your sympathies shouldn't have been touched. If you thought we were brutes, that would leave you free, wouldn't it?"

"It did."

"Ah, yes—exactly!" She seemed to triumph for an instant. Then she looked out of the window again, and again spoke irrelevantly. "Are you in love?"

Peter frowned. "No." He was too young not to be stiff about it.

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"That's rather a pity. I could have explained better."

"Oh, I know what it stands for."

She corrected him gently. "It 'stands for' nothing whatever. Either you've loved or you haven't. It might have helped me—that's all." Then she seemed to brace herself for difficult exposition.

"Listen, Peter. You must know this first. In the months just following your birth, everything changed. Your father developed tuberculosis—alarmingly, it was then supposed. That meant another climate. He owned property in Honolulu. It occurred to him to go there. In not taking you we acted on physicians' advice. There was no telling what sort of life we might have to live. You were best off here. You were under expert care, and in those days we had news of you constantly. I am quite well aware"—her voice grew surer as she went on; she seemed less fantastically feminine, more simply human—"that many women would have chosen differently. For me there could be no question. You had been brought into the world in the belief that there would be no choice to make. We never dreamed, when you were born, of

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anything but the normal American life. I insist on your realizing that."

Peter bowed. It already began to change his vision of himself a little, though he wasn't sure he liked his mystery to be merely tubercular. Though if that was all, why in the world—but he saw that he could only listen and wait.

"Then—Honolulu didn't serve very long. We had to go farther away from life. Now we're in Tahiti. It's—it's a very wonderful climate."

Mrs. Wayne rose, drew the crimson curtain to one side, and looked out. It was a moment before she spoke, and as she spoke she sat down again with helpless grace.

"I find it very hard to tell. I don't think I can tell you it all."

"I don't see why you should have come at all, unless you are going to tell me everything there is to tell. But if you've really funked it, I don't care, you know." Thus Peter, maintaining his bravado.

"You don't help me out." The blue eyes rested on him critically. "But I suppose it's not your fault. Since you don't know anything about anything——"

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"I can't give you a leg up. No."

She frowned a little, as if troubled by his phrasing, but resigned herself to it. "No; you can't give me a leg up."

"I say—" He leaned forward with a sudden impulse. "Why don't I go back with you? Or come out later? Lots of people going to Tahiti now, you know, since they've exhausted the Spanish Main. Plenty of attractions: drives round the island, perfect scenery, native customs on tap—ordeal by fire and hot stones. It's in the advertisements along with the rates and sailings. No reason why I shouldn't come."

She had drawn back while he spoke with a perfectly obvious terror. With parted lips, and coiled hair, and her very blood (it seemed) turned white, she looked like Greek tragic masks that he had seen in museums. These he had always thought grinning prevarications; now, he acknowledged their authenticity. His jauntiness faded into a stare. Then she pulled herself together, as Peter would have said, by slow, difficult degrees, like a kaleidoscope turned too slowly—pitiful to see.

"No, Peter, you must never come to Tahiti. He—he couldn't bear it."

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"He?"

"Your father."

"Oh—my father." His imagination had not yet evoked his father. "I had forgotten him, for the moment."

"Forgotten him! What extraordinary things you say!"

"Well, why shouldn't I forget him? He hasn't even taken the trouble to spend twenty-four hours in America to make my acquaintance." Something acrid *had* risen in the cup, and Peter's lips were bitter.

Her white fingers moved again to the folds of her veil, as if the frail mesh weighed intolerably upon her brows.

"If you forget him, of course I can never explain. He is all there is." She indulged then in an appraising glance. "You look kind and good. I didn't think you would be undutiful."

Undutiful! It was her turn to introduce an unfamiliar vocabulary. "Undutiful!" Peter repeated. "What do you mean? That I'm expected to be grateful to him for being my father?"

She smiled. She lifted her hands. She all but applauded him. "Yes, just that!"

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Peter stared. He had two favorite words with which to describe the legitimately surprising. One of them was "rum." But such an idea as this called for the other. It was—positively—"rococo."

She went on then. Apparently his ironic question had smitten the rock, for the fluent tale gushed forth, watering all the arid past. But to Peter it was as if a man blinded and drenched with spray should try to drink of it. The first sentences came too quickly. In all his two and twenty years they found no context. He had still to learn the way of them. He supposed it was because he was finding out at last what it was to have a real mother.

"It wasn't always Tahiti," he heard her saying after a little. "We've tried everything south of the equator, I've sometimes thought. Valparaiso, for a long time. Perhaps you knew? Spencer Martin——"

"Never even told me when you changed your continent." He was blandly bitter. Somehow it did hurt, as she went on.

"The climate," Mrs. Wayne murmured again. And then she named other stages of their progress—all places, Peter reflected, that were in the geogra-

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phies and in Kipling, and nowhere else. It made his parents sound like vagabonds of fiction. Her trailing narrative did not add to their reality. The details she mentioned were wildly exotic, and those she took for granted he could not supply. Her careful English was interlarded with strange scraps of Spanish and native names for things which left the objects, for him, unrecognizable. He made nothing out of it except that it wasn't what he should call a life at all. He didn't even see whether it was whim or necessity that controlled them. As soon as anything in her story became coherent or comprehensible, she doubled on her tracks. At first he threw in occasional questions, but the answers didn't explain; and soon he stopped asking them. A foreignness like that left his very curiosities unphraseable. He came to the point where he didn't even know what it was that he wanted to know. There was, to be sure, the irregularly recurrent stress on the hope of health, an obsession, apparently, under which they had faintly struggled and madly rambled; but it didn't make much more sense than what he had learned in childhood about Ponce de Leon. You might as well ask a firefly to show you

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your way. Clearly, she hadn't the gift of biography. He sat very still and intent, trying to make a pattern out of it; but she merely succeeded in dazing him. Then suddenly, when he was most bewildered, it came to an end, ran out in a mere confession of failure.

"And nowhere, at any time, has the miracle happened. He has never been well enough to come back. We have always had to stay away."

"It must have been a strange life," Peter mused.

"Strange? It may be. Strange for him, no doubt: so fitted for civilization—for your world."

"You speak as if it weren't yours."

"Oh, mine," she said simply; "*he* was mine. I don't ask for more civilization than that—than my husband."

It was the most sentimental speech that Peter had ever heard from human lips, and he stared incredulously. But incredulity faded. Her tone of voice worked on him even after she fell silent. He still felt its vibration in the air while the mask shifted subtly before his eyes. Somehow, as she sat there, breathing such simple passion from her intricate adornments,

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she became at once more astounding and more intelligible. One saw it all—even Peter, in his young and untutored heart, knew infallibly. She had loved her husband supremely, and she had chucked everything for him. She had chucked so much, in fact, that she had even lost all sense of the worth of what she had cast away. She had nothing left to measure it by. Peter felt that America itself was a good deal to have chucked. It soothed his pride a little, to be sure, to have her treat New York so cavalierly. She hadn't so much as looked at it; and she had circumnavigated the globe for him. It was clear, too, that every moment of the journey was a kind of torture to her. Her very look round the room divulged an agony of strangeness and suspense. She was just longing to be back on her island. Peter thrilled a little foolishly to it. He fancied it was a *grande passion*. The only *grande passion* Peter had hitherto known had been that of a sophomore friend for his landlady's daughter. That, though it had been enhanced by proper detail of elopement, disinheritance, and threats of suicide, had disappointed them all in the end. The bride was rather silly and tried to borrow money; and

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when Peter and Marty, in their senior year, had reread Lawrence's sonnet-sequence, they had found that it didn't scan. But this—this was different. Whatever his mother had undertaken, she had obviously put it through. After all those years of marriage, to have your voice vibrate like that! It had never occurred to Peter that a fellow's mother could still be in love with his father. Even in novels mothers weren't. As for life: he recalled the parents that he knew. He had never seen another woman with just that look, the look of a dedicated being, of some one whose bloom had been, first and last, both jealously hoarded and lavishly spent. She was like a woman out of a harem: a million graces for one man, but a mere veiled bundle to all the rest. That was the secret of her uniqueness. She was a charming woman to whom the notion of charming the world at large would be blasphemous. Her mood had been slowly orientalized to match her exterior, which had gradually grown exotic. She would die in suttee. Peter felt her quality no less poignantly because his words for it were unsure. Of course she didn't want to stay in America! Of course she was off to Vancouver

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at midnight! And yet—why, why had she come? Would she never explain?

She had been looking out of the window while he soliloquized—it was part of the whole sub-tropical spectacle of her that she should limit herself to so few hours, and then be as languid as if she had leased a suite at the St. Justin for life. She turned just as Peter had made up his mind to speak.

"There was one summer when you wanted to go to the Caucasus, I remember—a rather queer trip that was going to cost a great deal. We were sorry —I was dreadfully sorry—that you couldn't go."

Peter frowned. There you were! She crammed the supreme interview of a lifetime into an hour, and then had the audacity to be irrelevant.

"We couldn't afford it just then. It—it was a very expensive year. I had to tell Spencer we couldn't. I hope you didn't hate us for it."

Peter laughed. "I didn't even know you had anything to do with it. Old Martin didn't tell me it was funds. He just wet-blanketed the whole thing—said it wasn't safe and he couldn't hear of it. I didn't mind much. I went to Murray Bay to visit another

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chap. But, I say—do you mean old Martin asked you?"

"He cabled."

"And you?"

"I cabled back."

"Has he been consulting you about me all these years? In cases like that, when I didn't dream of it?"

"Oh, only occasionally," she hastened to say. "We haven't been spying on you."

"No, I should hope not." Then he called himself a queer duck, aggrieved for twenty years because he hadn't been spied on, and now aggrieved at the thought that he might be.

"Was it you, by the way," he asked, "who were interested in my affairs, or my father?" Her pronouns had been a little confusing.

"Your father has had, more and more, to leave all correspondence to me." For the first time, her words came glibly. She had evidently packed that sentence in her trunk before starting.

"Is he so very ill?" Peter had veered at last to an interest in his other parent; it was clear that his other parent was the real clue to the mystery.

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"Oh, horribly—horribly!" It was almost a cry. She bent forward. "So ill, Peter, so ill that you mustn't come now, ever. He loathes it so—being so ill. And he is so very proud—as why shouldn't he be? Can't you see how he would mind? Do you think I'd have come if it had been possible to send for you? Do you think I'd have left him if there had been any other way? I'm not sure, as it is, that I ought to have come. It has been terrible, to be getting farther away every day; to know that I'm as far away from him as it is possible to be on this earth. And think what it must be for him, alone—and *there!*"

Well, she was as pathetic now as any little old lady in a gray shawl could be; only she was, somehow, tragic too. Her face was like the white grave of beauty. Peter was stupefied.

"There?" he repeated.

She flung out her hands. "On a savage island. Think of him on a savage island!"

"I can't, very well," murmured Peter inaudibly. Then: "But has he always been so ill? For twenty years? Or"—he fixed her a little more directly—"is there something besides illness?"

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She did not answer. She rose and looked out of the window, and as Peter rose and stood beside her, she lifted one hand to his shoulder. There was something ineffably gracious in the gesture. She seemed to be making it all up to him. "Such a patched life, Peter," she murmured. "You can't blame him for not having wanted me to come."

"Oh, he didn't want you to come?"

She hesitated for an instant. "No. And now I must go."

"Now?" he asked stupidly.

"Oh, yes, at once. I shan't have time to dine with you." She looked helplessly about for a scarf that she had thrown down.

"But no!" Peter broke out. "It's preposterous. To come like this and go like this! Your train doesn't go for hours—if you will go to-night."

"But I haven't arranged for it. I haven't packed."

"Why, you haven't unpacked!" he cried.

"Oh, I think Frances may have. And I mustn't fail to get off. There are the tickets to get, too. Peter, I *must* go." She spoke as if to delay were unspeakable treason; and, as she spoke, she turned to cross the room to the door.

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"I say," said Peter, standing squarely in her way, "why did you come? You shan't go without telling me that." It wasn't the way to speak to one's mother, but she had chosen to discard the maternal code.

She broke off in the act of withdrawal and turned to him. Her blue eyes were tearless but very sad. "I loved you dearly when you were very little," she said simply. "I've never quite forgotten that. I suddenly realized that, if I waited any longer, I could never come. I think it was a cruel and foolish thing for me to do, and I'm a little ashamed of it; but—kiss me, Peter."

Before he obeyed, he clutched at one more straw. "You won't see old Martin?"

"I said good-bye to him a great many years ago." She smiled. "I had no one to see in America except you. No—there's a cab waiting. Good-bye."

He kissed her then. It was clear to him that he might only watch her go. He saw her stop to rouse the old servant who waited in the hall. Then she passed, with strange grace, out of his life.

There was only one tone to take with Marty, who arrived, as always, late and breathless. "She's the

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most charming woman I've ever met, and it's the devil's own luck that she had to go straight on to Vancouver to get a steamer back. My father—who is apparently a charmer, by the way—is very ill. She's wonderful. It's the biggest thing that has ever happened to me. She's made everything as right as right. But I can't tell you about it. After twenty years—you understand, old man——"

It was less the loyal friend than the loyal son; but he was still, dining that night at Plon's (he wondered where the deuce she was dining), very much under her dominion. She had brought with her a rare illumination. He would never forget her voice and her veiled eyes. He hadn't dreamed a woman could suggest her love in so many silent ways. She just *was* adoration, implicit and incarnate. It was tremendous to have seen it. The white light it threw on Lawrence's bride! The white light it threw, for that matter, on all the women he knew! He felt himself bursting with knowledge.

It was not until after dinner, indeed, that he realized just how wonderful in another way she had been, and with how little knowledge of another

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sort she had left him. She had told him absolutely nothing. So far as he was concerned, her narrative had only concealed events. He couldn't remember whether New Zealand had followed or preceded Chile; and his sincere impression was that it didn't matter, even to them. Anything that in all those years *had* mattered, had been dropped away out of sight between her sentences. If he had been by his hour both racked and inebriated (for that was what his state of tension amounted to), it was not because of any facts she had given him. She had not even answered his plain questions. She had left him in dismay as soon as he had begun to ask them. He saw that now, though in his simplicity he hadn't seen it before. He had been sacrificed again, as he had always been sacrificed. His mystery was still his mystery, and he was still left alone with his monstrous hypotheses. He wouldn't have missed it for anything—not even for good old Marty. But he turned to Marty at last with compunction.

"Marty, old man," he said, "it *was* rum."

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THE WINE OF VIOLENCE

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THE WINE OF VIOLENCE

I AM an old man now, and, like many other old men, I feel like making confession. Not of my own sins. I have always been called, I am well aware, a dilettante, and I could hardly have sinned in the ways of the particular sinners of whom I am about to speak. But I have the dilettante's liking for all realities that do not brush him too close. Throughout the case of Filippo and Rachel Upcher, I was always on the safe side of the footlights. I have no excuse for not being honest, and I have at last an excuse for speaking. It is wonderful how the death of acquaintances frees one; and I am discovering, at the end of life, the strange, lonely luxury of being able to tell the truth about nearly every one I used to know. All the prolonged conventional disloyalties are passed away. It is extraordinary how often one is prevented from telling the blessed truth about the familiar dead because of some irrelevant survivor.

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I do not know that there was much to choose between Filippo and Rachel Upcher—though the world would not agree with me. Both of them, in Solomon's words, "drank the wine of violence." I never really liked either of them, and I have never been caught by the sentimental adage that to understand is to forgive. If we are damned, it is God who damns us, and no one ventures to accuse Him of misunderstanding. It is a little late for a mere acquaintance to hark back to the Upchers, but by accident I, and I only, know the main facts that the world has so long been mistaken about. They were a lurid pair; they were not of my clan. But I cannot resist the wholly pious temptation to set my clan right about them. I should have done it long ago, in years when it would have made "scare-heads" in the same papers that of old had had so many "scare-heads" about the Upchers, but for my dear wife. She simply could not have borne it. To tell the story is part of the melancholy freedom her death has bestowed on me.

By the time you have read my apology, you will have remembered, probably with some disgust, the Upcher "horror." I am used to it, but I can still

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wince at it. I have always been pleased to recognize that life, as my friends lived it, was not in the least like the newspapers. Not to be like the newspapers was as good a test of caste as another. Perhaps it is well for a man to realize, once in his time, that at all events the newspapers are a good deal like life. In any case, when you have known fairly well a man sentenced and executed for murder—and on such evidence!—you never feel again like saying that "one doesn't know" people who sue for breach of promise. After all, every one of us knows people who accept alimony. But I've enough grudge against our newspapers to be glad that my true tale comes too late for even the *Orb* to get an "extra" out of it. The *Orb* made enough, in its time, out of the Upchers. On the day when the charwoman gave her evidence against Filippo Upcher, the last copies of the evening edition sold in the New York streets for five dollars each. I have said enough to recall the case to you, and enough, I hope, to explain that it's the kind of thing I am very little used to dealing with. "Oblige me by referring to the files," if you want the charwoman's evidence. Now I may as well get to my

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story. I want it, frankly, off my hands. It has been pushing for a year into my *Italian Interludes;* thrusts itself in, asking if it isn't, forsooth, as good, for emotion, as anything in the Cinquecento. And so, God knows, it is . . . but the Cinquecento charwomen have luckily been obliterated from history.

I knew Filippo Upcher years ago; knew him rather well in a world where the word "friend" is seldom correctly used. We were "pals," rather, I should think: ate and drank together at Upcher's extraordinary hours, and didn't often see each other's wives. It was Upcher's big period. London and New York went, docile enough, to see him act Othello. He used to make every one weep over Desdemona, I know, and that is more than Shakespeare unassisted has always managed. Perhaps if he hadn't done Othello so damnably well, with such a show of barbaric passion— It was my "little" period, if I may say it; when I was having the inevitable try at writing plays. I soon found that I could not write them, but meanwhile I lived for a little in the odd flare of the theatric world. Filippo Upcher—he always stuck, even in playbills, you remember, to the

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absurd name—I had met in my Harvard days, and I found him again at the very heart of that flare. The fact that his mother was an Italian whose maiden name had been brushed across with a title got him into certain drawing-rooms that his waistcoats would have kept him out of. She helped him out, for example, in Boston—where "baton sinister" is considered, I feel sure, merely an ancient heraldic term. Rachel Upcher, his wife, I used to see occasionally. She had left the stage before she married Upcher, and I fancy her tense renditions of Ibsen were the last thing that ever attracted him. My first recollection of her is in a *pose plastique* of passionate regret that she had never, in her brief career, had an opportunity to do *Ghosts*. *Rosmersholm*, I believe, was as far as she ever went. She had beauty of the incongruous kind that makes you wonder when, where, and how the woman stole the mask. She is absolutely the only person I ever met who gave you the original of the much-imitated "mysterious" type. She was eternally mysterious—and, every day, quite impossible. It wasn't to be expected that poor Evie should care to see much of her, and I never

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put the question that Mrs. Upcher seemed to be always wanting to refuse to answer. The fact is that the only time I ever took poor Evie there, Filippo and his wife quarrelled so vulgarly and violently that we came away immediately after dinner. It would have been indecent to stay. You were sure that he would beat her as soon as you left, but also that before he had hurt her much, she would have cut his head open with a plate. Very much, you see, in the style of the newspapers. I saw Filippo at the club we both had the habit of, and, on his Anglo-Saxon days, liked him fairly well. When his Italian blood rose beneath his clear skin, I would have piled up any number of fictitious engagements to avoid him. He was unspeakable then: unappeasable, vitriolic, scarce human. You felt, on such days, that he wanted his *entrée* smeared with blood, and you lunched at another table so that at least the blood shouldn't be yours. I used to fancy whimsically that some ancestress of his had been a housemaid to the Borgias, and had got into rather distinguished "trouble." But she must have been a housemaid. I did not, however, say this to any one during the trial; for I was sure

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that his passion was perfectly unpractical, and that he took action only in his mild moments.

I found, as I say, that I could not write plays. My wife and I went abroad for some years. We saw Upcher act once in London, but I didn't even look him up. That gives you the measure of our detachment. I had quite forgotten him in the succeeding years of desultory, delightful roaming over southern Europe. There are alike so much to remember and so much to forget, between Pirene and Lourdes! But the first head-lines of the first newspaper that I bought on the dock, when we disembarked reluctantly in New York, presented him to me again. It was all there: the "horror," the "case," the vulgar, garish tragedy. We had landed in the thick of it. It took me some time to grasp the fact that a man whom I had occasionally called by his first name was being accused of that kind of thing. I don't need to dot my i's. You had all seen Filippo Upcher act, and you all, during his trial, bought the *Orb*. I read it myself—every sickening column that had been, with laborious speed, jotted down in the court-room. The evidence made one feel that, if this was murder,

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a man who merely shoots his wife through the heart need not be considered a criminal at all. It was the very scum of crime. Rachel Upcher had disappeared after a violent quarrel with her husband, in which threats—overheard—had been freely uttered. He could give no plausible account of her. Then the whole rotten mass of evidence—fit only for a rag-picker to handle—began to come in. The mutilated body disinterred; the fragments of marked clothing; the unused railway ticket—but I really cannot go into it. I am not an *Orb* reporter. The evidence was only circumstantial, but it was, alack! almost better than direct testimony. Filippo was perfectly incoherent in defence, though he, of course, pleaded "not guilty." He had, for that significant scene—he, Filippo Upcher!—no stage presence.

The country re-echoed the sentence, as it had re-echoed every shriek of the evidence, from Atlantic to Pacific. The jury was out five hours—would have been out only as many minutes if it had not been for one Campbell, an undertaker, who had some doubts as to the sufficiency of the "remains" disinterred to make evidence. But the marked under-

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clothing alone made their fragmentariness negligible. Campbell was soon convinced of that. It was confused enough, in all conscience—he told Upcher's and my friend, Ted Sloan, later—but he guessed the things the charwoman overheard were enough to convict any man; he'd stick to that. Of course, the prosecuting attorney hadn't rested his case on the imperfect state of the body, anyhow—had just brought it in to show how nasty it had been all round. It didn't even look very well for him to challenge medical experts, though a body that had been buried was a little more in his line than it was in theirs, perhaps. And any gentleman in his profession had had, he might say, more practical experience than people who lectured in colleges. He hadn't himself, though, any call from superior technical knowledge to put spokes in the wheel of justice. He guessed that was what you'd call a quibble. And he was crazy to get home—Mrs. C. was expecting her first, any time along. Sloan said the man seemed honest enough; and he was quite right —the chain of circumstance was, alas! complete. Upcher was convicted of murder in the first degree,

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and sentenced to death. He didn't appeal—wouldn't, in spite of his counsel, and Sloan's impassioned advice: "Give 'em a run for their money, Filippo. Be a sport, anyhow!"

"Lord, man, all juries are alike," was the response. "They've no brains. I wouldn't have the ghost of a show, and I'm not going through that racket again, and make a worse fool of myself on the stand another time."

"But if you don't, they'll take it you've owned up."

"Not necessarily, after they've read my will. I've left Rachel the 'second best bed.' There wasn't much else. She's got more than I ever had. No, Sloan, a man must be guilty to want to appeal. No innocent man would go through that hell twice. I want to get out and be quiet."

The only appeal he did make was not such as to give Mr. Campbell any retrospective qualms of conscience. The request was never meant to get out, but, like so many other things marked "private," it did. His petition was for being allowed to act a certain number of nights before his execution. He owed

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frightful sums, but, as he said, no sums, however frightful, could fail to be raised by such a device.

"It would kill your chances of a reprieve, Filippo," Sloan said he told him.

"Reprieve?" Filippo had laughed. "Why, it would *prove* me guilty. It would turn all the evidence pale. But think of the box-office receipts. There would have to be a platoon of police deadheading in the front rows, of course. But even at that——!"

Sloan came away a little firmer for circumstantial evidence than he had been before. He wouldn't see Filippo again; wouldn't admit that it was a good epigram; wouldn't even admit that it was rather fine of Filippo to be making epigrams at all. Most people agreed with him: thought Upcher shockingly cynical. But of course people never take into account the difference there is between being convicted and pleading guilty. Is it not *de rigueur* that, in those circumstances, a man's manner should be that of innocence? Filippo's flight has always seemed to me a really fine one. But I do not know of any man one could count on to distil from it the pure attar of honesty.

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We had gone straight to my wife's family in New England, on arriving. Until I saw Sloan, I had got my sole information about Upcher from the newspapers. Sloan's account of Filippo's way of taking it roused my conscience. If a man, after all that, could show *any* decency, one owed him something. I decided, without consulting my wife about it, to go over to New York and see Filippo myself. Evie was so done up by the thought of having once dined with the Upchers that I could hardly have broken my intention to her. I told her, of course, after I returned, but to know beforehand might have meant a real illness for her. I should have spared her all of it, had it not seemed to me, at the moment, my duty to go. The interview was not easy to manage, but I used Evie's connections shamelessly, and in the end the arrangement was made. I have always been glad that I went, but I don't know anything more nerve-racking than to visit a condemned criminal whose guilt you can not manage to doubt. Only Filippo's proposal (of which Sloan had told me) to act long enough to pay his debts, made me do it. I still persist in thinking it magnificent of Filippo, though I don't pretend there

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wasn't in his desire some lingering lust of good report. The best he could hope for was to be forgotten; but he would naturally rather be forgotten as Hamlet than as Filippo Upcher.

Upcher was not particularly glad to see me, but he made the situation as little strained as possible. He did no violent protesting, no arraigning of law and justice. If he had, perhaps, acted according to the dictates of his hypothetical ancestress, he at least spoke calmly enough. He seemed to regard himself less as unjustly accused than as unjustly executed, if I may say so: he looked on himself as a dead man; his calamity was irretrievable. The dead may judge, but I fancy they don't shriek. At all events, Upcher didn't. A proof of his having cast hope carelessly over his shoulder was his way of speaking of his wife. He didn't even take the trouble to use the present tense; to stress, as it were, her flesh-and-blood reality. It was "Rachel was," never "Rachel is"—as we sometimes use the past tense to indicate that people have gone out of our lives by their own fault. The way in which he spoke of her was not tactful. A franker note of hatred I've never—except

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perhaps once—heard struck. Occasionally he would pull himself up, as if he remembered that the dead are our natural creditors for kindly speech.

"She was a devil, and only a devil could live with her. But there's no point in going into it now."

I rather wanted him to go into it: not—might Heaven forbid!—to confess, but to justify himself, to gild his stained image. I tried frankness.

"I think I'll tell you, Upcher, that I never liked her."

He nodded. "She was poison; and I am poisoned. That's the whole thing."

I was silent for a moment. How much might it mean?

"You read the evidence?" he broke out. "Well, it was bad—damned bad and dirty. I'd rather be hanged straight than hear it all again. But it's the kind of thing you get dragged into sooner or later if you link yourself to a creature like that. I suppose I'm essentially vulgar, but I'm a better lot than she was—for all her looks."

"She had looks," I admitted.

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"No one could touch her at her best. But she was an unspeakable cat."

It had been, all of it, about as much as I could stand, and I prepared to go. My time, in any case, was about up. I found it—in spite of the evidence—shockingly hard to say good-bye to Upcher. You know what farewells by a peaceful death-bed are; and you can imagine this.

There was nothing to do but grip his hand. "Good-bye, Filippo."

"Good-bye, old man. I'll see you—" The familiar phrase was extinguished on his lips. We stared at each other helplessly for an instant. Then the warder led me out.

The Upcher trial—since Filippo refused to appeal—had blown over a bit by the time I went West. My widowed sister was ill, and I left Evie and every one, to take her to southern California. We followed the conventional route of flight from tuberculosis, and lingered a little in Arizona, looking down into the unspeakable depths of the Grand Cañon. I rather hoped Letitia would stay there, for I've never seen anything else so good; but the unspeakable depths

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spoke to her words of terror. She wanted southern California: roses, and palms, and more people. It was before the Santa Fé ran its line up to Bright Angel, and of course El Tovar wasn't built. It was rather rough living. Besides, there were Navajos and Hopis all about, and Letitia came of good Abolitionist stock and couldn't stand anything that wasn't white. So we went on to Santa Barbara.

There we took a house with a garden; rode daily down to the Pacific, and watched the great blue horizon waves roll ever westward to the immemorial East. "China's just across, and that is why it looks so different from the Atlantic," I used to explain to Letitia; but she was never disloyal to the North Shore of Massachusetts. She liked the rose-pink mountains, and even the romantic Mission of the Scarlet Woman; but she liked best her whist with gentle, white-shawled ladies, and the really intellectual conversations she had with certain college professors from the East. I could not get her to take ship for Hawaii or Samoa. She distrusted the Pacific. After all, China *was* just across.

I grew rather bored, myself, by Santa Barbara,

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before the winter was out. Something more exotic, too, would have been good for Letitia. There was a little colony from my sister's Holy Land, and in the evenings you could fancy yourself on Brattle Street. She had managed, even there, to befog herself in a New England atmosphere. I was sure it was bad for her throat. I won't deny, either, that there was more than anxiety at the heart of my impatience. I could not get Filippo Upcher out of my head. After all, I had once seen much of him; and, even more than that, I had seen him act a hundred times. Any one who had seen him do Macbeth would know that Filippo Upcher could not commit a murder without afterthoughts, however little forethought there might have been in it. It was all very well for van Vreck to speculate on Filippo's ancestry and suggest that the murder was a pretty case of atavism—holding the notion up to the light with his claret and smiling æsthetically. Upcher had had a father of sorts, and he wasn't all Borgia—or housemaid. Evie never smirched her charming pages with the name of Upcher, and I was cut off from the *Orb;* but I felt sure that the San Francisco papers would announce the

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date of his execution in good time. I scanned them with positive fever. Nothing could rid me of the fantastic notion that there would be a terrible scene for Upcher on the other side of the grave; that death would but release him to Rachel Upcher's Stygian fury. It seemed odd that he should not have preferred a disgusted jury to such a ghost before its ire was spent. The thought haunted me; and there was no one in Letitia's so satisfactory circle to whom I could speak. I began to want the open; for the first time in my life, to desire the sound of unmodulated voices. Besides, Letitia's régime was silly. I took drastic measures.

It was before the blessed days of limousines, and one had to arrange a driving trip with care. Letitia behaved very well. She was really worried about her throat, and absurdly grateful to me for giving up my winter to it. I planned as comfortably as I could for her—even suggested that we should ask an acquaintance or two to join us. She preferred going alone with me, however, and I was glad. Just before we started, while I was still wrangling with would-be guides and drivers and sellers of horses, the news of

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Upcher's execution came. If I could have suppressed that day's newspapers in Santa Barbara, I should have done so, for, little as I had liked Filippo, I liked less hearing the comments of Letitia's friends. They discussed the case, criminologically, through an interesting evening. It was quite scientific and intolerably silly. I hurried negotiations for the trip, and bought a horse or two rather recklessly. Anything, I felt, to get off. We drove away from the hotel, waving our hands to a trim group (just photographed) on the porch.

The days that followed soothed me: wild and golden and increasingly lonely. We had a sort of cooking kit with us, which freed us from too detailed a schedule, and could have camped, after a fashion; but usually by sundown we made some rough tavern or other. Letitia looked askance at these, and I did not blame her. As we struck deeper in toward the mountains, the taverns disappeared, and we found in their stead lost ranches—self-sufficing, you would say, until, in the parched faces of the womenfolk, all pretence of sufficiency broke down. Letitia picked up geological specimens and was in every way admi-

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rable, but I did not wish to give her an overdose. After a little less than a fortnight, I decided to start back to Santa Barbara. We were to avoid travelling the same country twice, and our route, mapped, would eventually be a kind of rough ellipse. We had just swung round the narrow end, you might say, when our first real accident occurred. The heat had been very great, and our driver had, I suspect, drunk too much. At all events, he had not watched his horses as he should have done, and one of the poor beasts, in the mid-afternoon, fell into a desperate state with colic. We did what we could—he nearly as stupid as I over it—but it was clear that we could not go on that night whither we had intended. It was a question of finding shelter, and help for the suffering animal. The sky looked threatening. I despatched the inadequate driver in search of a refuge, and set myself to impart hope to Letitia. The man returned in a surprisingly short time, having seen the outbuildings of a ranch-house. I need not dwell on details. We made shift to get there eventually, poor collapsed beast and all. A ranchman of sorts met us and conducted Letitia to the house. The ranch be-

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longed, he said, to a Mrs. Wace, and to Mrs. Wace, presumably, he gave her in charge. I did not, at the moment, wish to leave our horse until I saw into what hands I was resigning him. The hands seemed competent enough, and the men assured me that the animal could travel the next day. When the young man returned from the ranch-house, I was quite ready to follow him back thither, and get news of Letitia. He left me inside a big living-room. A Chinese servant appeared presently and contrived to make me understand that Mrs. Wace would come down when she had looked after my sister. I was still thinking about the horse when I heard the rustle of skirts. Our hostess had evidently established Letitia. I turned, with I know not what beginnings of apologetic or humorous explanation on my lips. The beginning was the end, for I stood face to face with Rachel Upcher.

I have never known just how the next moments went. She recognized me instantly, and evidently to her dismay. I know that before I could shape my lips to any words that should be spoken, she had had time to sit down and to suggest, by some mo-

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tion of her hand, that I should do the same. I did not sit; I stood before her. It was only when she began some phrase of conventional surprise at seeing me in that place of all places that I found speech. I made nothing of it; I had no solution; yet my message seemed too urgent for delay. All that I had suffered in my so faint connection with Filippo Upcher's tragedy returned to me in one envenomed pang. I fear that I wanted most, at the moment, to pass that pang on to the woman before me. My old impatience of her type, her cheap mysteriousness, her purposeless inscrutability possessed me. I do not defend my mood; I only give it to you as it was. I have often noticed that crucial moments are appallingly simple to live through. The brain constructs the labyrinth afterwards. All perplexities were merged for me just then in that one desire—to speak, to wound her. But my task was not easy, and I have never been proud of the fashion of its performance.

"Mrs. Wace" (even the subtle van Vreck could not have explained why I did not give her her own name), "is it possible—but I pray Heaven it is—that you don't know?"

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"Know?" It was the voice of a stone sphinx.

"How can I tell you—how can I tell you?"

"What?"

"About Filippo."

"Filippo?"

"Yes, Filippo! That he is dead."

"Dead?" The carved monosyllables were maddening.

"Yes—killed. Tried, sentenced, *executed.*"

Her left hand dropped limply from the lace at her throat to a ruffle of her dress. "For what?" Her voice vibrated for the first time.

"For murdering you."

"Me?" She seemed unable to take it in.

"You must have seen the papers."

"I have seen no papers. Does one leave the world as utterly as I have left it, to read newspapers? On a lonely ranch like this"—she broke off. "I haven't so much as seen one for five months. I—I—" Then she pulled herself together. "Tell me. This is some horrid farce. What do you mean? For God's sake, man, tell me!"

She sat back to hear.

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I cannot remember the words in which I told her. I sketched the thing for her—the original mystery, breaking out at last into open scandal when the dismembered body was found; the evidence (such of it as I could bring myself to utter in the presence of that so implicated figure); the course of the trial; Filippo's wretched defence; the verdict; the horrid, inevitable result. My bitterness grew with the story, but I held myself resolutely to a tone of pity. After all—it shot across my mind—Filippo Upcher had perhaps in the grave found peace.

It must have taken me, for my broken, difficult account, half an hour. Not once in that time was I interrupted. She seemed hardly to breathe. I told her to the very date and hour of his execution. I could give her no comfort; only, at best, bald facts. For what exhibition of self-loathing or self-pity I had been prepared I do not know; but surely for some. I had been bracing myself throughout for any kind of scene. No scene of any kind occurred. She was hard and mute as stone. I could have dealt better, when at last I stopped, with hysterics than with that figure before me—tense, exhausted,

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terrible. I found myself praying for her tears. But none came.

At last I rose—hoping by the sudden gesture to break her trance. Her eyes followed me. "Terrible—terrible—beyond anything I ever dreamed." I caught the whispered words. I took the chance for pity; found myself—though I detested the woman as never before—wanting to comfort her.

"He never appealed," I reminded her. "Perhaps he was glad to die." It sounded weak and strange; but who could tell what words would reach that weak, strange heart?

I stood before her, more perplexed than at any other moment of my life. At last she opened her eyes and spoke. "Leave me. And do not tell your sister who I am. I shall pull myself together by dinner-time. Go!" She just lifted her hand, then closed her eyes again.

I went out, and, stumbling across a Chinese servant, got him to show me my room.

Of what use would it be to recall, after all the years, what I felt and thought during the next hours? I did not try to send Letitia to Mrs. Upcher. Letitia

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would have been of no use, even if she had consented to go. It was sheerest wisdom to obey Rachel Upcher, and not to tell. But I had a spasm of real terror when I thought of her "pulling herself together" in her lonely chamber. I listened for a scream, a pistol-shot. It did not seem to me that a woman could hear news like that which it had been my tragic luck to give, without some according show of emotion. Yet a little later I asked myself in good faith what show could ever fit that situation. What speech, what gesture, in that hour, would have been adequate? The dangerous days, in point of fact, would probably come later. I thought more of her, in those two hours, than of Filippo. Though she might well, from all the evidence, have hated him quite honestly, hers was the ironic destiny that is harder to bear than mere martyrdom. No death had ever been more accidental, more irrelevant, more preventable than Filippo's. One fortnight sooner, she could have turned back the wheel that had now come full circle. That was to be her Hell, and—well, having descended into it in those two hours, I was glad enough to mount once more into the free air.

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Mrs. Upcher kept her promise. She pulled herself together and came to dinner, in a high black dress without so much as a white ruche to relieve it. The manager of the ranch, a young Englishman named Floyd, dined with us. He was handsome in a bloodshot way, and a detrimental, if ever there has been one. In love with Mrs. Upcher he looked to be; that, too, in the same bloodshot way. But she clearly had him in perfect order. The mask, I suppose, had worked. Letitia did her social best, but her informing talk failed to produce any pleasant effect. It was too neat and flat. Floyd watched Mrs. Upcher, and she watched the opposite wall. I did my best to watch no one. We were rather like a fortuitous group at a provincial *table d'hôte:* dissatisfied with conditions and determined not to make acquaintance. We were all thankful, I should think, when the meal was over. Mrs. Upcher made no attempt to amuse us or make us comfortable. The young manager left for his own quarters immediately after dinner, and Letitia soon went to her room. I lingered for a moment, out of decency, thinking Rachel Upcher might want to speak to me, to ask me something, to cry out to me,

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to clutch me for some desperate end. She sat absolutely silent for five minutes; and, seeing that the spell, whatever it was, was not yet broken, I left her.

I did not go to bed at once. How should I have done that? I was still listening for that scream, that pistol-shot. Nothing came. I remember that, after an hour, I found it all receding from me—the Upchers' crossed emotions and perverted fates. It was like stepping out of a miasmic mist. Filippo Upcher was dead; and on the other side of the grave there had been no such encounter for him as I had imagined. And I had positively seen a demoniac Rachel Upcher waiting for him on that pale verge! I searched the room for books. There was some Ibsen, which at that moment I did not want. I rejected, one after one, nearly all the volumes that the shelves held. It was a stupid collection. I had about made up my mind to the "Idylls of the King" (they were different enough, in all conscience, from the Upcher case) when I saw a pile of magazines on a table in a distant corner. "Something sentimental," I proposed to myself, as I went over to ravage them. Underneath the magazines—a scattered lot, for the most part, of *London*

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Graphics and *English Illustrateds*—I found a serried pack of newspapers: San Francisco and Denver sheets, running a few months back. I had never seen a Denver newspaper, and I picked one up to read the editorials, out of a desultory curiosity rare with me. On the first page, black head-lines took a familiar contour. I had stumbled on the charwoman's evidence against Filippo Upcher. *Rien que ça!*

My first feeling, I remember, was one of impotent anger—the child's raving at the rain—that I must spend the night in that house. It was preposterous that life should ask it of me. Talk of white nights! What, pray, would be the color of mine? Then I, in my turn, "pulled myself together." I went back to the newspapers and examined them all. The little file was arranged in chronological order and was coextensive with the Upcher case, from arrest to announcement of the execution. The *Orb* might have been a little fuller, but not much. The West had not been fickle to Filippo.

I sat staring at the neatly folded papers for a time. They seemed to me monstrous, not fit to touch, as if they were by no means innocent of Filippo Up-

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cher's fate. By a trick of nerves and weak lamplight, there seemed to be nothing else in the room. I was alone in the world with them. How long I sat there, fixing them with eyes that must have shown clear loathing, I have never known. There are moments like that, which contrive cunningly to exist outside of Time and Space, of which you remember only the quality. But I know that when I heard steps in the corridor, I was sure for an instant that it was Filippo Upcher returning. I was too overwrought to reflect that, whatever the perils of Rachel Upcher's house might be, the intrusion of the dead Filippo was not one of them: that he would profit resolutely by the last league of those fortunate distances—if so it chanced, by the immunity of very Hell. It could not be Filippo's hand that knocked so nervously on the door. Nor was it. I opened to Rachel Upcher. The first glance at her face, her eyes, her aimless, feverish, clutching hands, showed that the spell had at last been broken. She had taken off her black dress and was wrapped in loose, floating, waving pink. Have you ever imagined the Erinyes in pink? No other conceivable vision suggests the figure that

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stood before me. I remember wondering foolishly and irrelevantly why, if she could look like that, she had not done Ibsen better. But she brought me back to fact as she beckoned me out of the room.

"I am sorry—very sorry—but—I was busy with your sister when you came in, and they have given you the wrong room. I will send some one to move your things—I will show you your room. Please come—I am sorry."

I cannot describe her voice. The words came out with difficult, unnatural haste, like blood from a wound. Between them she clutched at this or that shred of lace. But I could deal better even with frenzy than with the mask that earlier I had so little contrived to disturb. I felt relieved, disburdened. And Filippo was safe—safe. I was free to deal as I would.

I stepped back into the room. The pile of papers no longer controlled my nerves. After all, they had been but the distant reek of the monster. I went over and lifted them, then faced her.

"Is this what you mean by the wrong room?"

She must have seen at once that I had examined

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them; that I had sounded the whole significance of their presence there. The one on top—I had not disturbed their order—gave in clear print the date fixed for Filippo Upcher's execution: that date now a fortnight back. And she had played to me, as if I were a gallery god, with her black dress!

"I have looked them through," I went on; "and though I didn't need to read those columns, I know just what they contain. You knew it all." I paused. It would have taken, it seemed to me, the vocabulary of a major prophet to denounce her fitly. I could only leave it at that bald hint of her baseness.

She made no attempt at denial or defence. Something happened in her face—something more like dissolution than like change—as if the elements of her old mask would never reassemble. She stepped forward, still gathering the floating ribands, the loose laces, in her nervous hands. Once she turned as if listening for a sound. Then she sat down beside my fire, her head bent forward toward me; ready, it seemed, to speak. Her fingers moved constantly, pulling, knotting, smoothing the trailing streamers of her gown. The rest of her body was as

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still as Filippo Upcher's own. I endured her eyes for a moment. Then I repeated my accusation. "You knew it all."

"Yes, I knew it all."

I had not dreamed, in spite of the papers that I clutched in full view of her, that she would confess so simply. But they apparently brought speech to her lips. She did not go on at once, and when she did, she sounded curiously as Filippo Upcher in prison had sounded. Her voice touched him only with disgust. Yet she stinted no detail, and I had to hear of Filippo's vices: his vanities, his indiscretions, his infidelities, all the seven deadly sins against her pride committed by him daily. He may have been only a bounder, but his punishment had been fit for one heroic in sin. I did my best to keep that discrepancy in mind as she went on vulgarizing him. I am no cross-questioner, and I let her account move, without interruption, to the strange, fluttering *tempo* of her hands. Occasionally her voice found a vibrant note, but for the most part it was flat, impersonal as a phonograph: the voice of the actress who is not at home in the unstudied

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rôle. I do not think she gauged her effect; I am sure that she was given wholly to the task of describing her hideous attitude veraciously. There was no hint of appeal in her tone, as to some dim tribunal which I might represent; but she seemed, once started, to like to tell her story. It was not really a story—the patched portrait of a hatred, rather. Once or twice I opened my lips to cry out: "Why not, in Heaven's name, a divorce rather than this?" I always shut them without asking, and before the end I understood. The two had simply hated each other too much. They could never be adequately divorced while both beheld the sun. To walk the same earth was too oppressive, too intimate a tie. It sounds incredible—even to me, now; but I believed it without difficulty at that moment. I remembered the firmness with which Filippo had declared that, herself poison, she had poisoned him. Well, there *were* fangs beneath her tongue.

Heaven knows—it's the one thing I don't know about it, to this day—if there was any deliberate attempt on Rachel Upcher's part to give her flight a suspicious look. There were so many ways, when

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once you knew for a fact that Filippo had not killed her, in which you could account for the details that earlier had seemed to point to foul play. My own notion is that she fled blindly, with no light in her eyes—no ghastly glimmer of catastrophe to come. She had covered her tracks completely because she had wished to be completely lost. She didn't wish Filippo to have even the satisfaction of knowing whether she was alive or dead. Some of her dust-throwing—the unused ticket, for example—resulted in damming evidence against Filippo. After that, coincidence labored faithfully at his undoing. No one knows, even now, whose body it was that passed for Rachel Upcher's. All other clues were abandoned at the time for the convincing one that led to her. I have sometimes wondered why I didn't ask her more questions: to whom she had originally given the marked underclothing, for example. It might have gone far toward identifying what the Country Club grounds had so unluckily given up. But to lead those tortured fragments of bone and flesh into another masquerade would have been too grotesque. And at that moment, in the wavering,

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unholy lamplight of the half-bare, half-tawdry room —the whole not unlike one of Goya's foregrounds— justice and the public were to me equally unreal. What I realized absolutely was that so long as Rachel Upcher lived, I might not speak. Horror that she was, she had somehow contrived to be the person who must be saved. I would have dragged her by the hair to the prison gates, had there been any chance of saving Filippo—at least, I hope I should. But Filippo seemed to me at the moment so entirely lucky that to avenge him didn't matter. I think I felt, sitting opposite that Fury in pink, something of their own emotion. Filippo was happier, *tout bonnement*, in another world from her; and to do anything to bring them together—to hound her into suicide, for example—would be to play him a low trick. I could have drunk to her long life as she sat there before me. It matters little to most of us what the just ghosts think; how much less must our opinion matter to them! No; Rachel Upcher, even as I counted her spots and circles, was safe from me. I didn't want to know anything definitely incriminating about her flight, anything that would

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bring her within the law, or impose on me a citizen's duties. Citizens had already bungled the situation enough. If she had prepared the trap for Filippo, might that fact be forever unknown! But I really do not believe that she had. What she had done was to profit shamelessly (a weak word!) by coincidence. I have often wondered if Rachel Upcher never wavered, never shuddered, during those months of her wicked silence. That question I even put to her then, after a fashion. "It was long," she answered; "but I should do it all again. He was horrible." What can you do with hatred like that? He had been to her, as she to him, actual infection. "Poison . . . and I am poisoned." Filippo's words to me would have served his wife's turn perfectly. There was, in the conventional sense, for all her specific complaints, no "cause." She hated him, not for what he did but for what he was. She *would* have done it all again. The mere irony of her action would have been too much for some women; but Rachel Upcher had no ironic sense—only a natural and Ibsen-enhanced power of living and breathing among unspeakable emotions. And she plucked at those

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ribands, those laces, with the delicate, hovering fingers of a ghoul.

It is all so long ago that I could not, if I would, give you the exact words in which, at length, she made all this clear. Neither my mind nor my pen took any stenographic report of that conversation. I have given such phrases as I remember. The impression is there for life, however. Besides, there is no man who could not build up for himself any amount of literature out of that one naked fact: that Rachel Upcher knew her husband's plight, and that she lay, mute, breathless, concealed, in her lair, lest she should, by word or gesture, save him. She took the whole trial, from accusation to sentence, for a piece of sublime, unmitigated luck—a beautiful blunder of Heaven's in her behalf. That she thought of herself as guilty, I do not believe; only as—at last!—extremely fortunate. At least, as her tale went on, I heard less and less any accent of hesitation. She knew—oh, perfectly—how little any one else would agree with her. She was willing to beg my silence in any attitude of humility I chose to demand. But Rachel Upcher would never accuse

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herself. I asked no posturing of her. She got my promise easily enough. Can you imagine my going hotfoot to wake Letitia with the story? No more than that could I go to wake New York with it. Rachel Upcher, calmed by my solemn promise (though, if you'll believe it, her own recital had already greatly calmed her), left me to seek repose. I watched her fluttering, sinister figure down the corridor, then came back to my infected room. She had not touched the pile of newspapers. I spent the night reading Ibsen; and in the morning managed so that we got off early. Mrs. Wace did not come down to breakfast, and I did not see her again. Young Floyd was in the devil of a temper, but his temper served admirably to facilitate our departure. He abandoned ranch affairs entirely to get us safely on our way. Our sick horse was in perfectly good condition, and would have given us no possible excuse for lingering. Letitia, out of sight of the ranch, delivered herself of a hesitating comment.

"Do you know, Richard, I have an idea that Mrs. Wace is not really a nice woman?"

I, too, had broken Mrs. Wace's bread, but I did

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not hesitate. "I think you are undoubtedly right, Letitia."

It was the only thing I have ever, until now, been able to do to avenge Filippo Upcher. Even when I learned (I always had an arrangement by which I should learn, if it occurred) of Mrs. Floyd's death, I could still do nothing. There was poor Evie, who never knew, and who, as I say, could not have borne it.

I shall be much blamed by many people, no doubt, for having promised Rachel Upcher what she asked. I can only say that any one else, in my place, would have done the same. They were best kept apart: I don't know how else to put it. I shall be blamed, too, for not seizing my late, my twelfth-hour opportunity to eulogize Filippo Upcher—for not, at least, trying to explain him. There would be no point in trying to account for what happened by characterizing Filippo. Nothing could account for such hatred: it was simply a great natural fact. They combined, like chemical agents, to that monstrous result. Each was, to the other, poison. I tell the truth now because no one has ever doubted Up-

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cher's guilt, and it is only common fairness that he should be cleared. Why should I, for that reason, weave flatteries about him? He did not murder his wife; but that fact has not made it any easier to call him "Filippo," which I have faithfully done since I encountered Rachel Upcher in southern California. If truth is the order of the day, let me say the other thing that for years I have not been at liberty to say: he was a frightful bounder.

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ON THE STAIRCASE

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ON THE STAIRCASE

PROBABLY the least wise way to begin a ghost-story is to say that one does not believe in ghosts. It suggests that one has never seen the real article. Perhaps, in one sense, I never have; yet I am tempted to set down a few facts that I have never turned over to the Society for Psychical Research or discussed at my club. The fact is that I had ingeniously forgotten them until I saw Harry Medway, the specialist—my old classmate—a few years ago. I say "forgotten"; of course, I had not forgotten them, but, in order to carry on the business of life, I had managed to record them, as it were, in sympathetic ink. After I heard what Harry Medway had to say, I took out the loose sheets and turned them to the fire. Then the writing came out strong and clear again—letter by letter, line by line, as fatefully as Belshazzar's "immortal postscript." Did I say that I do not believe in ghosts? Well—I am getting toward the end, and a

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few inconsistencies may be forgiven to one who is not far from discoveries that will certainly be inconsistent with much that we have learned by heart in this interesting world. Perhaps it will be pardoned me as a last flicker of moribund pride if I say that in my younger days I was a crack shot, and to the best of my belief never refused a bet or a drink or an adventure. I do not remember ever having been afraid of a human being; and yet I have known fear. There are weeks, still, when I live in a bath of it. I think I will amend my first statement, and say instead that I do not believe in any ghosts except my own—oh, and in Wender's and Lithway's, of course.

Some people still remember Lithway for the sake of his charm. He never achieved anything, so far as I know, except his own delightful personality. He was a classmate of mine, and we saw a great deal of each other both in and after college—until he married, indeed. His marriage coincided with my own appointment to a small diplomatic post in the East; and by the time that I had served my apprenticeship, come into my property, resigned from the service, and returned to America, Lithway's wife

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had suddenly and tragically died. I had never seen her but once—on her wedding-day—but I had reason to believe that Lithway had every right to be as inconsolable as he was. If he had ever had any ambition in his own profession, which was law, he lost it all when he lost her. He retired to the suburban country, where he bought a new house that had just been put up. He was its first tenant, I remember. That fact, later, grew to seem important. There he relapsed into a semi-populated solitude, with a few visitors, a great many books, and an inordinate amount of tobacco. These details I gathered from Wender in town, while I was adjusting my affairs.

Never had an inheritance come so pat as mine. There were all sorts of places I wanted to go to, and now I had money enough to do it. The *wanderlust* had nearly eaten my heart out during the years when I had kicked my heels in that third-rate legation. I wanted to see Lithway, but a dozen minor catastrophes prevented us from meeting during those breathless weeks, and as soon as I could I positively had to be off. Youth is like that. So that, although

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Lithway's bereavement had been very recent, at the time when I was in America settling my affairs and drawing the first instalment of my beautiful income—there is no beauty like that of unearned increment—I did not see him until he had been a widower for more than two years.

The first times I visited Lithway were near together. I had begun what was to be my almost life-long holiday by spending two months alone—save for servants—on a house-boat in the Vale of Cashmere; and my next flights were very short. When I came back from those, I rested on level wing at Braythe. Lithway was a little bothered, on one of these occasions, about the will of a cousin who had died in Germany, leaving an orphan daughter, a child of six or seven. His conscience troubled him sometimes, and occasionally he said he ought to go over and see that the child's inheritance was properly administered. But there was an aunt—a mother's sister—to look after the child, and her letters indicated that there was plenty of money and a good lawyer to look after the investments. Since his wife's death, Lithway had sunk into lethargy. He

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had enough to live on, and he drew out of business entirely, putting everything he had into government bonds. When he hadn't energy enough left to cut off coupons, he said, he should know that it was time for him to commit suicide. He really spoke as if he thought that final indolence might arrive any day. I read the aunt's letters. She seemed to be a good sort, and the pages reeked of luxury and the maternal instinct. I rather thought it would be a good excuse to get Lithway out of his rut, and advised him to go; but, when he seemed so unwilling, I couldn't conscientiously say I thought the duty imperative. I had long ago exhausted Germany—I had no instinct to accompany him.

Lithway, then, was perfectly idle. His complete lack of the executive gift made him an incomparable host. He had been in the house three years, and I was visiting him there for perhaps the third time, when he told me that it was haunted. He didn't seem inclined to give details, and, above all, didn't seem inclined to be worried. He sat up very late always, and preferably alone, a fact that in itself proved that he was not nervous. As I said, I had

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never been interested in ghosts, and the newness of the house robbed fear of all seriousness. Ghosts batten on legend and decay. There wasn't any legend, and the house was almost shockingly clean. When he told me of the ghost, then, I forbore to ask for any more information than he, of his own volition, gave me. If he had wanted advice or assistance, he would, of course, have said so. The servants seemed utterly unaware of anything queer, and servants leave a haunted house as rats a sinking ship. It really did not seem worth inquiring into. I referred occasionally to Lithway's ghost as I might have done to a Syracusan coin which I should know him proud to possess but loath to show.

On my return from Yucatan, one early spring, Lithway welcomed me as usual. He seemed lazier than ever, and I noticed that he had moved his books down from a second-story to a ground-floor room. He slept outdoors summer and winter, and he had an outside stairway built to lead from his library up to the sleeping-porch. A door from the sleeping-porch led straight into his dressing-room. I laughed at his arrangements a little.

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"You live on this side of the house entirely now —cut off, actually, from the other side. What is the matter with the east?"

He pointed out to me that the dining-room and the billiard-room were on the eastern side and that he never shunned them. "It's just a notion," he said. "Mrs. Jayne" (the housekeeper) "sleeps on the second floor, and I don't like to wake her when I go up at three in the morning. She is a light sleeper."

I laughed outright. "Lithway, you're getting to be an old maid."

It was natural that I should dispose my effects in the rooms least likely to be used by Lithway. I took over his discarded up-stairs study, and, with a bedroom next door, was very comfortable. He assured me that he had no reason to suppose I should ever be disturbed in either room. Moving his own things, he said, had been purely a precautionary measure in behalf of Mrs. Jayne. Curiously enough, I was perfectly sure that his first statement was absolutely true and his second absolutely false. Only the first one, however, seemed to be really my affair. I could hardly complain.

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Lithway did seem changed; but I have such an involuntary trick of comparing my rediscovered friends with the human beings I have most recently been seeing that I did not take the change too seriously. He was perfectly unlike the Yucatan Indians; but, on reflection, why shouldn't he be, I asked myself. Probably he had always been just like that. I couldn't prove that he hadn't. Yet I did think there was something back of his listlessness other than mere prolonged grief for his wife. Occasionally, I confess, I thought about the ghost in this connection.

One morning I was leaving my sitting-room to go down to Lithway's library. The door of the room faced the staircase to the third story, and as I came out I could always see, directly opposite and above me, a line of white banisters that ran along the narrow third-story hall. Mechanically, this time, I looked up and saw—I need not say, to my surprise—a burly negro leaning over the rail looking down at me. The servants were all white, and the man had, besides, a very definite look of not belonging there. He didn't, in any way, fit into his background. I ran up the stairs to investigate. When I got just beneath him,

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he bent over towards me with a malicious gesture. All I saw, for an instant, was a naked brown arm holding up a curious jagged knife. The edge caught the little light there was in the dim hall as he struck at me. I hit back, but he had gone before I reached him—simply ceased to be. There was no Cheshire-cat vanishing process. I was staring again into the dim hall, over the white banisters. There were no rooms on that side of the hall, and consequently no doors.

A light broke in on me. I went down-stairs to Lithway. "I've seen your ghost," I said bluntly.

What seemed to be a great relief relaxed his features. "You have! And isn't she extraordinary?"

"She?"

"You say you've seen her," he went on hurriedly.

"Her? *Him*, man—black as Tartarus. And he cut me over the head."

"There?" Lithway drew his finger down the place.

"Yes. How did you know? I don't feel it now."

"Look at yourself."

He handed me a mirror. The slash was indicated clearly by a white line, but there was no abrasion.

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"That is very interesting," I managed to say; but I really did not half like it.

Lithway looked at me incredulously. "She has never had a weapon before," he murmured.

"She? This was a man."

"Oh, no!" he contradicted. "That's impossible."

"He was a hairy brute and full-bearded besides," I calmly insisted.

Lithway jumped up. "My God! there's some one in the house." He caught up a revolver. "Let us go and look. He'll have made off with the silver."

"Look here, Lithway," I protested. "I tell you this man wasn't real. He vanished into thin air—like any other ghost."

"But the ghost is a woman." He was as stupid as a child about it.

"Then there are two." I didn't really believe it, but it seemed clear that we could never settle the dispute. Each at least would have to pretend to believe the other for the sake of peace.

"Suppose you tell me about your ghost," I suggested soothingly. But Lithway was dogged, and we had to spend an hour exploring the house and count-

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ing up Lithway's valuables. Needless to say, there was no sign of invasion anywhere. At the end of the hour I repeated my demand. The scar was beginning to fade, I noted in the mirror, though still clearly visible.

"Suppose you tell me about *your* ghost. You never have, you know."

"I've only seen her a few times."

"Where?"

"Leaning over the banisters in the third-floor hall."

"What is she like?"

"A slip of a girl. Rather fair and drooping, but a strange look in her eyes. Dressed in white, with a blue sash. That's all."

"Does she speak?"

"No; but she waves a folded paper at me."

"What time of day have you seen her?"

"About eleven in the morning."

The clocks were then striking twelve.

"Well," I ventured, "that's clearly the ghost's hour. But the two of them couldn't be more different."

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He made me describe the savage again. The extraordinary part of it was that, in spite of his baffling blackness, I could do so perfectly. He was as individual to me as a white man—more than that, as a friend. He had personality, that ghost.

"What race should you say he was?"

I thought. "Some race I don't know; Zulu, perhaps. A well-built beggar."

"And you're perfectly sure he was real—I mean, wasn't human?"

The distinction made me smile, though the question irritated me. "You can see that if his object was murder he made a poor job. You found all your silver, didn't you?" Then I played my trump-card. "And do you suppose that a burglar would wander round this countryside in a nose-ring and a loincloth? Nice disguise!"

Lithway looked disturbed. "But the other one," he murmured. "I don't understand the other."

"She seems much easier to understand than mine," I protested.

"Oh, I don't mean *her!*" he said. "I mean *it.*"

For the first time I began to be afraid that Lith-

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way had left the straight track of common sense. It was silly enough to have two ghosts in a new house —but three!

"It?" I asked.

"The one Wender saw."

"Oh! Wender has seen one?"

"Six months ago. I've never been able to get him here since. It *was* rather nasty, and Wender—well, Wender's sensitive. And he's a little dotty on the occult, in any case."

"Did he see it at eleven in the morning?"

Lithway seemed irritated. "Of course!" he snapped out. He spoke as if the idiosyncrasy of his damned house had a dignity that he was bound to defend.

"And what was it?"

"A big rattlesnake, coiled to strike."

Even then I could not take it seriously. "That's not a ghost; it's a symptom."

"It *did* strike," Lithway went on.

"Did he have a scar?"

"No. He couldn't even swear that it quite touched him."

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"Then why did it worry him?"

Lithway hesitated. "I suppose the uncertainty——"

"Uncertainty! If there's anything less dreadful than an imaginary snake that has struck, it is an imaginary snake that hasn't struck. What has got into Wender?"

"Fear, apparently," said Lithway shortly. "He won't come back. Says a real rattlesnake probably wouldn't get into a house in Braythe more than once, but an unreal rattlesnake might get in any day. I don't blame him."

"May I ask," I said blandly, "if you are so far gone that you think rattlesnakes have ghosts?"

Lithway lost his temper. "If you want to jeer at the thing, for God's sake have the manners not to do it in this house! I tell you we have all three seen ghosts."

"The ghost of a rattlesnake," I murmured to myself. "It beats everything!" And I looked once more into the mirror. The scar that the knife had made was still perceptible, but very faint. "Did you hunt the house over for the snake?"

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"Of course we did."

"Did you find it?"

"Of course we didn't—any more than we found your Zulu."

"Then why did you insist so on hunting the Zulu?"

Lithway colored a little. "Well, to tell the truth, I never wholly believed in that snake. If you or Wender had only seen *her*, now!"

"I don't see why Wender was so worried," I said. "After all, a snake might have got in—and got out."

"He saw it twice," explained Lithway.

"Symptoms," I murmured. "Had he ever had an adventure with a rattlesnake?"

"No."

"Then why should it make him nervous?"

"I suppose"—Lithway looked at me a little cautiously, I thought—"just because he never *had* seen one. He said, I remember, that that rattlesnake hadn't been born yet."

I laughed. "Wender *is* sensitive. The ghost of a rattlesnake that has never lived—well, you can't be more fantastic than that!"

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"Wender has a theory," Lithway said.

But he seemed actually to want to change the subject. Accordingly, I did change it—a little. I didn't really care for Wender's theories. I had heard some of them. They included elementals.

"Tell me some more about yours. She's the most convincing of the three. Do you recognize her?"

"Never saw any one that looked remotely like her."

"And you are the first occupant of this house," I mused. "Was she dressed in an old-fashioned way?"

Lithway actually blushed. "She is dressed rather oddly—her hair is done queerly. I've hunted the fashion-books through, and I can't find such a fashion anywhere in the last century. I'm not in the least afraid, but I am curious about her, I admit."

"Was Wender's rattlesnake old-fashioned?"

Lithway got up. "See here," he said, "I'm not going to stand jollying. That's the one thing I *am* afraid of. Should you like to hear Wender's theory?"

"Not I," I said firmly. "He believes in two kinds of magic—white and black—and has eaten the fruit of the mango-tree that a fakir has just induced to

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grow out of the seed before his eyes. He told me once that devils were square. I'm not in the least interested in Wender's rattlesnake. The wonder is, with his peculiar twist of mind, that he doesn't insist on living in this house."

"He particularly hates snakes," answered Lithway. "He was hoping to see *her*, but he never could. Nor you, apparently."

"How often do you see her?"

"About once in six months."

"And you're not afraid?"

"Well—she doesn't *do* anything to me, you know." He was very serious.

"Probably couldn't hurt you if she did—a young thing like that. But why don't you move out?"

Lithway frankly crimsoned. "I—like her."

"In spite of her eyes?"

"In spite of her eyes. And—I've thought that look in them might be the cross light on the staircase."

I burst out laughing. "Lithway, come away with me. Solitude is getting on your nerves. We'll go to Germany and look after your little cousin and the aunt who writes such wonderful letters."

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"No." Lithway was firm. "It's too much like work."

I was serious, for he really seemed to me, at the time of this visit, in rather a bad way. I urged him with every argument I could think of. He had no counter-arguments, but finally he broke out: "Well, if you will have it, I feel safer here."

"You've never seen her anywhere else, have you?"

"No."

"Then this seems to be the one point of danger."

"Wender's theory is that—" he began.

But I persisted in not hearing Wender's theory. Even when, a week later, my own experience was exactly duplicated and I had spent another day in watching a white line fade off my forehead, I still persisted. But, as Lithway wouldn't leave the house, I did. I began even to have a sneaking sympathy for Wender. But I didn't want to hear his theory. Indeed, to this day I never have heard it. Oddly enough, though, I should be willing to wager a good sum that it was accurate.

I was arranging for a considerable flight—something faddier and more dangerous than I had hitherto

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attempted—and to a friend as indolent as Lithway I could only prepare to bid a long farewell. He positively refused to accompany me even on the earlier and less difficult stages of my journey. "I'll stick to my home," he declared. It was a queer home to want to stick to, I thought privately, especially as the ghost was obviously local. He had never seen an apparition except at Braythe—nor had I, nor had Wender. I worried about leaving him there, for the one danger I apprehended was the danger of overwrought nerves; but Lithway refused to budge, and you can't coerce a sane and able-bodied man with a private fortune. I did carry my own precautions to the point of looking up the history of the house. The man from whom Lithway had bought it, while it was still unfinished, had intended it for his own occupancy; but a lucrative post in a foreign country had determined him to leave America. The very architect was a churchwarden, the husband of one wife and the father of eight children. I even hunted up the contractor: not one accident had occurred while the house was building, and he had employed throughout, most amicably, union labor

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on its own terms. It was silly of me, if you like, but I had really been shaken by the unpleasant powers of the place. After my researches it seemed clear that in objecting to it any further I shouldn't have a leg to stand on. In any case, Lithway would probably rather live in a charnel-house than move. I had to wash my hands of it all.

The last weeks of my visit were perfectly uneventful, both for Lithway and me—as if the house, too, were on its guard. I came to believe that there was nothing in it, and if either of us had been given to drinking, I should have called the eleven-o'clock visitation a new form of hang-over. I was a little inclined, in defiance of medical authorities, to consider it an original and interesting form of indigestion. By degrees I imposed upon myself to that extent. I did not impose on myself, however, to the extent of wanting to hear Wender talk about it; and I still blush to think how shallow were the excuses that I mustered for not meeting him at any of the times that he proposed.

This is a bad narrative, for the reason that it must be so fragmentary. It is riddled with lapses of time.

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Ghosts may get in their fine work in an hour, but they have always been preparing their *coup* for years. Every ghost, compared with us, is Methuselah. We have to fight in a vulnerable and dissolving body; but they aren't pressed for time. They've only to lie low until the psychologic moment. Oh, I'd undertake to accomplish almost anything if you'd give me the ghost's chance. If he can't get what he wants out of this generation, he can get it out of the next. Grand thing, to be a ghost!

It was some years before I went back to Braythe. Wender, I happen to know, never went back. Lithway used to write me now and then, but seldom referred to my adventure. He couldn't very well, since the chief burden of his letters was always "When are you coming to visit me?" Once, when I had pressed him to join me for a season in Japan, he virtually consented, but at the last moment I got a telegram, saying: "I can't leave her. *Bon voyage!*" That didn't make me want to go back to Braythe. I was worried about him, but his persistent refusal to act on any one's advice made it impossible to do anything for him. I thought once of hiring some one

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to burn the house down; but Lithway wouldn't leave it, and I didn't want to do anything clumsy that would imperil him. I was much too far away to arrange it neatly. I suggested it once to Wender, when we happened to meet in London, and he was exceedingly taken with the idea. I half hoped, for a moment, that he would do it himself. But the next afternoon he came back with a lot of reasons why it wouldn't do—he had been grubbing in the British Museum all day. I very nearly heard Wender's theory that time, but I pleaded a dinner engagement and got off.

You can imagine that I was delighted when I heard from Lithway, some years after my own encounter with the savage on the staircase, that he had decided to pull out and go to Europe. He had the most fantastic reasons for doing it—this time he wrote me fully. It seems he had become convinced that his apparition was displeased with him—didn't like the look in her eyes, found it critical. As he wasn't doing anything in particular except live like a hermit at Braythe, the only thing he could think of to propitiate her was to leave. Perhaps there was

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a sort of withered coquetry in it, too; he may have thought the lady would miss him if he departed and shut up the house. You see, by this time she was about the most real thing in his life. I don't defend Lithway; but I thought then that, whatever the impelling motive, it would be an excellent thing for him to leave Braythe for a time. Perhaps, once free of it, he would develop a normal and effectual repugnance to going back, and then we should all have our dear, delightful Lithway again. I wrote triumphantly to Wender, and he replied hopefully, but on a more subdued note.

Lithway came over to Europe. He wrote to me, making tentative suggestions that I should join him; but, as he refused to join me and I didn't care at all about the sort of thing he was planning, we didn't meet. I was all for the Peloponnesus, and he was for a wretched tourist's itinerary that I couldn't stomach. I hoped to get him in the end to wander about in more interesting places, but as he had announced that he was going first to Berlin to look up the little cousin and her maternal aunt, I thought I would wait until he had satisfied his clannish conscience.

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Then, one fine day, his old curiosity would waken, and we should perhaps start out together to get new impressions. That fine day never dawned, however. He lingered on in Germany, following his relatives to Marienbad when they left Berlin for the summer. I hoped, with each mail, that he would announce his arrival in some spot where I could conceivably meet him; but the particular letter announcing that never came. He was quite taken up with the cousins. He said nothing about going home, and I was thoroughly glad of that, at least.

I was not wholly glad, just at the moment, when a letter bounced out at me one morning, announcing that he was to marry the little cousin—by this time, as I had understood from earlier correspondence, a lovely girl of eighteen. I had looked forward to much companionship with the Lithway I had known of old, when he should be free of his obsession. I had thought him on the way to freedom; and here he was, caught by a flesh-and-blood damsel who thrust me out quite as decisively as the phantasmal lady on the staircase. I had decency enough to be glad for Lithway, if not for myself; glad that he could

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strike the old idyllic note and live again delightfully in the moment. I didn't go to Berlin to see them married, but I sent them my blessing and a very curious and beautiful eighteenth-century clock. I also promised to visit them in America. I felt that, if necessary, I could face Braythe, now that the ghost was so sure to be laid. No woman would stay in a house where her husband was carrying on, however unwillingly, an affair with an apparition; and, as their address remained the same, I believed that the ghost had given up the fight.

This story has almost the gait of history. I have to sum up decades in a phrase. It is really the span of one man's whole life that I am covering, you see. But have patience with me while I skim the intervening voids, and hover meticulously over the vivid patches of detail. . . . It was some two years before I reached Braythe. I don't remember particularly what went on during those two years; I only know that I was a happy wanderer. I was always a happy wanderer, it seems to me as I look back on life, except for the times when I sank by Lithway's side into his lethargy—a lucid lethargy, in which

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unaccountable things happened very quietly, with an utter stillness of context. I do know that I was planning a hunting-trip in British Central Africa, and wrote Lithway that I had better postpone my visit until that was over. He seemed so hurt to think that I could prefer any place to him that I did put it off until the next year and made a point of going to the Lithways.

I had no forebodings when I got out of Lithway's car at his gate and faced the second Mrs. Lithway, who had framed her beauty in the clustering wistaria of the porch. I was immensely glad for Lithway that he had a creature like that to companion him. Youth and beauty are wonderful things to keep by one's fireside. There was more than a touch of vicarious gratitude in my open admiration of Mrs. Lithway. He was a person one couldn't help wanting good things for; and one felt it a delicate personal attention to oneself when they came to him.

Nothing changes a man, however, after he has once achieved his type: that was what I felt most keenly, at the end of the evening, as I sat with Lithway in his library. Mrs. Lithway had trailed her

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light skirts up the staircase with incomparable grace, smiling back at us over her shoulder; and I had gone with Lithway to the library, wondering how long I could hold him with talk of anything but her. I soon saw that he didn't wish to talk of her. That, after all, was comprehensible—you could take it in so many ways; but it was with real surprise that I saw him sink almost immediately into gloom. Gloom had never been a gift of Lithway's; his indolence had always been shot through with mirth. Even his absorption in the ghost had been whimsical—almost as if he had deliberately let himself go, had chosen to be obsessed. I didn't know what to make of the gloom, the unresilient heaviness with which he met my congratulations and my sallies. They had been perfect together at dinner and through the early evening. Now he fell slack in every muscle and feature, as if the preceding hours had been a diabolic strain. I wondered a little if he could be worried about money. I supposed Lithway had enough —and his bride too, if it came to that—though I didn't know how much. But one could not be long in the house without noticing luxuries that had

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nothing to do with its original unpretending comfort. You were met at every turn by some æsthetic refinement as costly as the lace and jewels in which Mrs. Lithway's own loveliness was wrapped. It was evident from all her talk that her standard of civilization was very high; that she had a natural attachment to shining non-essentials. I was at a loss; I didn't know what to say to him, he looked so tired. Such silence, even between Lithway and me, was awkward.

Finally he spoke: "Do you remember my ghost?"

"I remember your deafening me with talk of her. I never saw her."

"No, of course you wouldn't have seen her."

"I saw one of my own, you remember."

"Oh, yes! A black man who struck at you. You never have had a black man strike at you in real life, have you?" He turned to me with a faint flicker of interest.

"Never. We threshed all that out before, you know. I never even saw that particular nigger except at Braythe."

"You will see him, perhaps, if you are fool enough to go to British Central Africa," he jerked out.

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"Perhaps," I answered. But I was more interested in Lithway's adventure. "Do you see your ghost now?" I had been itching to ask, and it seemed to me that he had given me a fair opening.

Lithway passed his hand across his brows. "I don't know. I'm not quite sure. Sometimes I think so. But I couldn't swear to it."

"Has she grown dimmer, then—more hazy? You used to speak of her as if she were a real woman coming to a tryst: flesh and blood, at the least."

He looked at me a little oddly. "I'm not awfully well. My eyes play me tricks sometimes. . . . When you got off the train to-night, I could have sworn you had a white scar on your forehead. As soon as we got out here and I had a good look at you, I saw you hadn't, of course." Then he went back. "I don't believe I really do see her now. I think it may be an hallucination when occasionally I think I do. Yes, I'm pretty sure that, when I think I do, it's pure hallucination. I don't like it; I wish she'd either go or stay."

"My dear fellow, you speak as if she had ever, in her palmiest days, been anything but an hallucina-

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tion. Did you get to the point of believing that the girl you say used to hang over the staircase was real?"

"She was more real than the one that sometimes I see there now. Oh, yes, she was real! What I see now—when I see it at all—is just the ghost of her."

"The ghost of a ghost!" I ejaculated. "It's as bad as Wender's rattlesnake."

Lithway turned to me suddenly. "Where is Wender?"

"Why, don't you know? Working on American archæology at some university—I don't know which. He hadn't decided on the place, when he last wrote. I was going to get his address from you."

"He won't come here, you know. And Margaret's feelings are a little hurt—he has often been quite near. So there's a kind of official coolness. She doesn't know about the ghosts, and therefore I can't quite explain Wender's refusals to her. Of course, I know it's on that account; he's as superstitious as a woman. But poor Margaret, I suppose, believes he doesn't approve of my having taken a wife. She's as sweet as possible about it, but I can see she's hurt.

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And yet I'd rather she would be hurt than to know about the house."

"Why, in Heaven's name, don't you sell it and move, Lithway?" I cried.

He colored faintly. "Margaret is very fond of the place. I couldn't, considering its idiosyncrasy, sell with a good conscience, and if I didn't sell, it would mean losing a pretty penny—more, certainly, than Margaret and I can afford to. She lost most of her own money, you know, a few years ago."

"The aunt?"

"Oh, dear, no!" He said it rather hastily. "But you were quite right at the time. I ought to have gone out there ten years ago. Women never know how to manage money."

I looked him in the eyes. "Lithway, anything in the world is better than staying in this house. You're in a bad way. You admit, yourself, you're not well. And Mrs. Lithway would rather cut out the motor and live anywhere than have you go to pieces."

He laughed. "Tell Margaret that I'm going to pieces—if you dare!"

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"I'm not afraid of you, even if I should."

"No; but wouldn't you be afraid of her?"

I thought of the utter youth of Mrs. Lithway; the little white teeth that showed so childishly when she laughed; her small white hands that had seemed so weighed down with a heavy piece of embroidery; her tiny feet that slipped along the polished floors —a girl that you could pick up and throw out of the window.

"Certainly not. Would you?"

"I should think so!" He smiled. "We've been very happy here. I don't think she would like to move. I shan't suggest it to her. And mind"—he turned to me rather sharply—"don't you hint to her that the house is the uncanny thing you and that fool Wender seem to think it is."

I saw that there was no going ahead on that tack. Beyond a certain point, you can't interfere with mature human beings. But certainly Lithway looked ill; and if he admitted ill health, there must be something in it. It was extraordinary that Mrs. Lithway saw nothing. I was almost sorry—in spite of the remembered radiance of the vision on the

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porch—that Lithway had chosen to fall in love with a young fool. I rose.

"Love must be blind, if your wife doesn't see you're pulled down."

"Oh, love—it's the blindest thing going, thank God!" He was silent for a moment. "There are a great many things I can't explain," he said. "But you can be sure that everything's all right."

I was quite sure, though I couldn't wholly have told why, that everything was at least moderately wrong. But I decided to say nothing more that night. I went to bed.

Lithway *was* ill; only so could I account for his nervousness, which sometimes, in the next days, mounted to irritability. He was never irritable with his wife; when the tenser moods were on, he simply ceased to address her, and turned his attention to me. We motored a good deal; that seemed to agree with him. But one morning he failed to appear at breakfast, and Mrs. Lithway seemed surprised that I had heard nothing during the night. He had had an attack of acuter pain—the doctor had been sent for. There had been telephoning, running to and

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fro, and talk in the corridors that no one had thought of keying down on my account. I was a little ashamed of not having waked, and more than a little cross at not having been called. She assured me that I could have done nothing, and apologized as prettily as possible for having to leave me to myself during the day. Lithway was suffering less, but, of course, she would be at his bedside. Naturally, I made no objections to her wifely solicitude. I was allowed to see Lithway for a few minutes; but the pain was severe, and I cut my conversation short. The doctor suspected the necessity for an operation, and they sent to New York for a consulting specialist. I determined to wait until they should have reached their gruesome decision, on the off chance that I might, in the event of his being moved, be of service to Mrs. Lithway. In spite of her calm and sweetness, and the perfect working of the household mechanism—no flurry, no fright, no delays or hitches—I thought her, still, a young fool. Any woman, of any age, was a fool if she had not seen Lithway withering under her very eyes.

It was a dreary day during which we waited for

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the New York physician; one of those days when sunlight seems drearier than mist—a monotonous and hostile glare. I tried reading Lithway's books, but the mere fact that they were his got on my nerves. I decided to go to my room and throw myself on the resources of my own luggage. There would be something there to read, I knew. I closed the library door quietly and went up-stairs. Outside my own door I stopped and looked—involuntarily, with no conscious curiosity—up to the third-story hall. There, in the dim corridor, leaning over the balustrade in a thin shaft of sunlight that struck up from the big window on the landing, stood Mrs. Lithway, with a folded paper in her hand, looking down at me. I did not wish to raise my voice—Lithway, I thought, might be sleeping—so did not speak to her. I don't think, in any case, I should have wanted to speak to her. The look in her eyes was distinctly unpleasant—the kind of look people don't usually face you with. I remember wondering, as our surprised glances met, why the deuce she should hate me like that—how the deuce a nice young thing could hate any one like that. It must

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be personal to me, I thought—no nice young thing would envisage the world at large with such venom. I turned away; and as I turned, I saw her, out of the tail of my eye, walk, with her peculiar lightness of step, along the upper corridor to the trunk-loft. She had the air of being caught, of not having wished to be seen. I opened my bedroom door immediately, but as I opened it I heard a sound behind me. Margaret Lithway stood on the threshold of her husband's room, with an empty bottle.

"Would you mind taking the car into the village and getting this filled again?" she asked. Her eyes had dark shadows beneath them; she had evidently not slept, the night before.

I flatter myself that I did not betray to her in any way my perturbation. Indeed, the event had fallen on a mind so ripe for solutions that, in the very instant of my facing her, I realized that what I had just seen above-stairs (and seen by mistake, I can assure you; she had fled from me) was Lithway's old ghost—no less. I took the bottle, read the label, and assured Mrs. Lithway that I would go at once. Mrs. Lithway was wrapped in a darkish

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house-gown of some sort. The lady in the upper hall had been in white, with a blue sash. . . . I was very glad when I saw Mrs. Lithway go into her husband's room and shut the door. I was having hard work to keep my expression where it belonged. For five minutes I stood in the hall; five minutes of unbroken stillness. Then I went to the garage, ordered out the car, and ran into the village, where I presented the bottle to the apothecary. He filled it immediately. As I re-entered the house, the great hall clock struck; it was half past eleven. I sent the stuff—lime-water, I believe—up to Mrs. Lithway by a servant, went into my room, and locked the door.

I cannot say that I solved the whole enigma of Braythe in the hour before luncheon; but I faced for the first time the seriousness of a situation that had always seemed to me, save for Lithway's curious reactions upon it, more than half fantastic, if not imaginary. I had seen, actually seen, Lithway's ghost. I had not been meant to see her; and I was inclined to regret the sudden impulse that had led me to leave Lithway's library and go to my

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own room. The identity of the "ghost" with Mrs. Lithway was appalling to me—the more so, that there could have been no mistake about the nature of the personality that had reluctantly presented itself to my vision. I found myself saying: "Could that look in her eyes be the cross light on the stairs?" and then suddenly remembered that I was only echoing the Lithway of years ago. It was incredible that any man should have liked the creature I had seen; and I could account for Lithway's long and sentimental relation with the apparition only by supposing that he had never seen her, as I had, quite off her guard. But if, according to his hint of the night before, he had come to confound the ghost with the real woman—what sort of marriage was *that?* I asked myself. The ghost was a bad lot, straight through. It brought me into the realm of pure horror. The event explained—oh, I raised my hands to wave away the throng of things it explained! Indeed, until I could talk once more with Lithway, I didn't want to face them; I didn't want to see clear. I had a horrid sense of being left alone with the phantoms that infested the house: alone, with a

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helpless, bedridden friend to protect. Mrs. Lithway didn't need protection—that was clearer than anything else. Mrs. Lithway was safe.

Before night, the consultation had been held, and it was decided that Lithway should be rushed straight to town for an operation. The pain was not absolutely constant; he had tranquil moments; but the symptoms were alarming enough to make them afraid of even a brief delay. We were to take him up the next morning. To all my offers of help, Mrs. Lithway gave a smiling refusal. She could manage perfectly, she said. I am bound to say that she did manage perfectly, thinking of everything, never losing her head, unfailingly adequate, though the shadows under her eyes seemed to grow darker hour by hour. A nurse had come down from town, but I could hardly see what tasks Mrs. Lithway left to the nurse. I did my best, out of loyalty to the loyal Lithway, to subdue my aversion to his wife. I hoped that my aversion was quite unreasonable and that, safe in Europe, I should feel it so. I ventured to say, after dinner, that I hoped she would try to get some sleep.

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"Oh, yes, I shall!" She smiled. "There will be a great deal to do to-morrow; and the day after, when they operate, will be a strain. There's nothing harder than waiting outside. I know." Her eyes filled, but she went on very calmly. "I am so grateful to you for being here and for going up with us. I have no people of my own, you know, to call on. You have been the greatest comfort." She gave me a cool hand, said "good night," and left me.

I do not know whether or not Mrs. Lithway slept, but I certainly did not, save in fitful dozes. I was troubled about Lithway: I thought him in very bad shape for an operation; and I had, besides, nameless forebodings of every sort. It was a comfort, the next morning, to hear him, through an open door, giving practical suggestions to his wife and the nurse about packing his things. I went in to see him before we started off. The doctor was down-stairs with Mrs. Lithway.

"Sorry to let you in for this, my boy. But you are a great help."

"Mrs. Lithway is wonderful," I said. "I congratulate you."

His sombre eyes held me. "Ah, you will never

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know how wonderful—never!" He said it with a kind of brooding triumph, which, at the moment, I did not wholly understand. Now, long afterwards, I think I do.

I left him, and crossed the corridor to my own room. A slight rustle made me turn. Mrs. Lithway stood in the upper hall, looking down at me—the same creature, to every detail of dress, even to the folded paper in her hand, that I had seen the previous morning. This time I braced myself to face the ghost, to examine her with a passionate keenness. I hoped to find her a less appalling creature. But, at once, Mrs. Lithway leaned over the rail and spoke to me—a little sharply, I remember.

"Would you please telephone to the garage and say that the doctor thinks we ought to start ten minutes earlier than we had planned? I shall be down directly."

The hand that held the paper was by this time hidden in the folds of her skirt. She turned and sped lightly along the corridor to the trunk-loft. Save for the voice, it was a precise repetition of what had happened the day before.

"Certainly," I said; but I did not turn away until

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she had disappeared into the trunk-loft. I went to the telephone and gave the message; it took only a few seconds. Then I went to my own room, leaving the door open so that I commanded the hall. In a few minutes Mrs. Lithway came down the stairs from the third story. "Did you telephone?" she asked accusingly, as she caught my eye. I bowed. She passed on into Lithway's room. There was no paper in her hand. I knew that this time there had been no ghost.

Well. . . . Lithway, as every one knows, died under the ether. His heart suddenly and unaccountably went back on him. He left no will; and, as he had no relations except the cousin whom he had married, everything went to her. I had once, before his second marriage, seen a will of Lithway's, myself; but I didn't care to go into court with that information, especially as in that will he had left me his library. I should have liked, for old sake's sake, to have Lithway's library. His widow sold it, and it is by now dispersed about the land. She told me, after the funeral, that she should go on at Braythe, that she never wanted to leave it; but,

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for whatever reason, she did, after a few years, sell the place suddenly and go to Europe. I have never happened to see her since she sold it, and I did not know the people she sold it to. The house was burned many years ago, I believe, and an elaborate golf-course now covers the place where it stood. I have not been to Braythe since poor Lithway was buried.

I took the hunting-trip that Lithway had been so violently and inexplicably opposed to. I think I was rather a fool to do it, for I ought to have realized, after Lithway's death, the secret of the house, its absolutely unique specialty. But such is the peacock heart of man that I still, for myself, trusted in "common sense"—in my personal immunity, at least, from every supernatural law. Indeed, it was not until I had actually encountered my savage, and got the wound I bear the scar of, that I gave entire credence to Lithway's tragedy. I put some time into recovering from the effect of that midnight skirmish in the jungle, and during my recovery I had full opportunity to pity Lithway.

It became quite clear to me that the presences

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at Braythe concerned themselves only with major dooms. If Lithway's ghost had been his wife, his wife must have been a bad lot. I am as certain as I can be of anything that he was exceedingly unhappy with her. It was a thousand pities that, for so many years, he had misunderstood the vision; that he had permitted himself—for that was what it amounted to—to fall in love with her in advance. She was, quite literally, his "fate." Of course, by this time, I feel sure that he couldn't have escaped her. I don't believe the house went in for kindly warnings; I think it merely, with the utmost insolence, foretold the inevitable and dared you to escape it. If I hadn't gone out for big game in Africa, I am quite sure that my nigger would have got at me somewhere else—even if he had to be a cannibal out of a circus running amuck down Broadway. That was the trick of the house: the worst thing that was going to happen to you leered at you authentically over that staircase. I have never understood why I saw Lithway's apparition; but I can bear witness to the fact that she was furious at my having seen her —as furious as Mrs. Lithway was, the next day, if

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it comes to that. It was a mistake. My step may have sounded like Lithway's. Who knows? At least it should be clear what Lithway meant when he said that he didn't always know whether he saw her or not. The two were pin for pin alike. The apparition, of course, had, from the beginning, worn the dress that Mrs. Lithway was to wear on the day that Lithway was taken to the hospital. I have never liked to penetrate further into the Lithways' intimate history. I am quite sure that the folded paper was the old will, but I have always endeavored, in my own mind, not to implicate Margaret Lithway more than that. Of course, there could never have been any question of implicating her before the public.

I never had a chance, after my own accident, to consult Wender. I stuck to Europe unbrokenly for many years, as he stuck to America. Both Wender and I, I fancy, were chary of writing what might have been written. Some day, I thought, we would meet and have the whole thing out; but that day never came. Suddenly, one autumn, I had news of his death. He was a member of a summer expedition in Utah and northern Arizona—I think I mentioned

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that he had gone in for American ethnology. There are, as every one knows, rich finds in our western States for any one who will dig long enough; and they were hoping to get aboriginal skulls and mummies. All this his sister referred to when she wrote me the particulars of his death. She dwelt with forgivable bitterness on the fact of Wender's having been told beforehand that the particular section he was assigned to was free from rattlesnakes. "Perhaps you know," she wrote, "that my brother had had, since childhood, a morbid horror of reptiles." I did know it—Lithway had told me. Wender's death from the bite of a rattlesnake was perhaps the most ironic of the three adventures; for Wender was the one of us who put most faith in the scenes produced on the stage of Braythe. I never heard Wender's theory; but I fancy he realized, as Lithway and I did not, that since the "ghosts" we saw were not of the past they must be of the future—a most logical step, which I am surprised none of us should have taken until after the event.

Wender's catastrophe killed in me much of my love of wandering. At least, it drove me to Harry

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Medway; and Harry Medway did the rest. I am not afraid of another warrior's cutting at me with his assegai; but I do not like to be too far from specialists. I have already been warned that I may sometime go blind; and I know that other complications may be expected. Pathology and surgery are sealed books to me; but I still hold so far to logic that I fully expect to die some time as an indirect result of that wound. The scar reminds me daily that its last word has not been said.

I am a fairly old man—the older that I no longer wander, and that I cling so weakly to the great capitals which hold the great physicians. The only thing that I was ever good at I can no longer do. Curiosity has died in me, for the most part; one or two such mighty curiosities have been, you see, already so terribly appeased. But I think I would rise from my death-bed, and wipe away with my own hand the mortal sweat from my face, for the chance of learning what it was that drove Mrs. Lithway, in midwinter, from Braythe. If I could once know what she saw on the staircase, I think I should ask no more respite. The scar might fulfil its mission.

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THE TORTOISE

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THE TORTOISE

"THERE are only three things worth while—fighting, drinking, and making love." It was Chalmers who said it to me as we came out of the theatre, and were idling along towards the club. We had been seeing a very handsome—almost elegant—melodrama. Very impressionable chap, Chalmers, I thought, for I was quite sure that he had never done any fighting; he was apparently a total abstainer; and he positively ran—as whole-heartedly as a frightened cow—from a petticoat.

"What about work?" I asked, as we turned into the club. Chalmers is a fiend for work: always shut up in his laboratory, dry-nursing an experiment.

"Work is an anodyne—a blooming anodyne." He hunched his shoulders, and his brown coat—the coat of a toilsome recluse, if ever there was one; there's something peculiarly unworldly about brown

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tweed for a man's wear—creased into lumpier curves than ever.

"It's a mighty slow one. If I wanted a quick effect, I think I'd take to cocaine. Must be exciting, slewing round the corners of Montmartre, dropping your francs into a basket that swings down from God knows where, with the blessed stuff all in it waiting to be inhaled. And all over inside of a year." Thus I to Chalmers, knowing that we were very far from Montmartre. Chalmers, I should say, was magnificently dependable; you were as safe in dropping a lurid suggestion on him as on the shell of an ancient turtle. I rather liked that idea, which struck me just then; in fact, his clothes were much the color of tortoise-shell.

"But I don't want it over. You see . . . I've agreed to hang on." His keen glance at me, more than his words, savored of explanation.

"Oh!" I made the syllable as non-committal as possible. The lips at one moment so fluent in confession will grow stiff with resentment after the hour of confidence is over. For that reason, I dislike to have people tell me things: I always expect that

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they will some day hate me, merely because they told.

We sat down at a table, and I ordered a high-ball. Chalmers fussed for a moment, and then committed himself to a *pâté* sandwich with apollinaris. I didn't think of asking him to join me. We had been trying for five years to get Chalmers to take a drink. For a year, there were always bets going on it; but it had been a long time now since any of us had made or lost anything on the chance of Chalmers's potations.

At the same time, my curiosity was aroused. There had never been any mystery about Chalmers. There isn't any about a tortoise, if it comes to that. The beast has been made much of mythologically, I believe; but even in India they only accuse him of holding up the world. No one pretends, so far as I know, that he keeps anything under his shell except himself. But Chalmers didn't seem to be even bearing a burden. He was simply Chalmers. He had come among us, an accredited student of physics, with letters of introduction from German professors and Colonial Dames; he had performed

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the absolutely necessary conventional duties; he was vaguely related to people that every one knew; he was so obviously a gentleman that no one would ever have thought of affirming it. His holidays were all accounted for—in fact, he usually spent them with one or another of our own group. There wasn't—there isn't now—a single thing about Chalmers that any one could have the instinct to investigate. It had never occurred to any of us that we didn't know as much about Chalmers as we did about the people we had been brought up with. We happened not to have been brought up with him, because he had happened to be brought up abroad. His father had been a consul somewhere.

On this occasion, anyhow, my curiosity got the better of my fixed rule. I decided to lead Chalmers on.

"Do you mean to say that your noble industry is nothing but a poor substitute for a drug?"

He smiled quaintly. His green eyes shone under his dark eyelashes. Very taking eyes they were: well set in his head and pleasantly intimate, with a near-sighted brilliancy.

"I didn't say it was a poor substitute. And, any-

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how, cocaine might charm away the hours, but only work can charm away the years. I've got into my stride—for eternity, it would seem. And some day, you know, I may, quite incidentally, do something in spectrum analysis that will be significant. I've got all the time in the world."

"Are you so sure?"

"Well—it looks as if I were in for a long wait."

He spoke as unconcernedly as if he had his lease of life locked up in his safe-deposit drawer.

I drank some whiskey and waited a minute, wondering whether to push his confidence over the edge, send it spinning into an abyss of revelation. Finally, I decided.

"I didn't know that anything but a contract with the devil could make you so sure."

"Oh, it doesn't have to be with the devil." He sipped his virtuous apollinaris. "Did you notice the heroine's sister?" he went on.

I hadn't noticed her much. I had been paying my money to see Maude Lansing act, and my frugal eyes had attached themselves to her exclusively, from the first act to the last.

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"A vague little blonde thing, wasn't she?"

"Blonde, but not so vague as you'd think. At least, I don't think she'd be vague if you gave her anything to do. She had to be vague to-night, of course. But didn't you see her deliberately subduing herself to the part—holding herself in, so as not to be too pretty, too angry, too subtle, too much in love? She did everything vaguely, I imagine, so as not to hog the stage. But give her a chance, and she'd play up. I was always expecting, you know, that she *would* hog the stage. She could have done it. . . . It quite got me going."

"Did you think her better than Maude Lansing?" It was something new, at least, to have him notice a woman so closely.

Chalmers tasted his *pâté* and half-nodded approvingly at it.

"Oh, I don't know anything about that. She is the only woman I have ever seen who looked like the girl I married."

I set down my glass quickly. I had drunk most of the whiskey, and therefore none of it was spilled. Chalmers married! Why—why—we knew all about

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him, from cradle to laboratory; or, at least, as much as men do know of other men who have no scrapes to be got out of. I looked narrowly at Chalmers. Was it possible that he had been lying low all these years, with the single intention of perpetrating eventually the supreme joke? And if he was merely a humorist of parts, why had he not assembled the crowd? Why had he selected only one of his intimates? His intimates! That was precisely what we were. Yet none of us knew that he had been married. Chalmers himself might easily not have mentioned a dead wife, but no end of people, first and last, had turned up and contributed to Chalmers's biography, and it was odd that none of them should have mentioned his bereavement. Unless——

"No one knows I am married. No one has ever known. If I told you all about it, you'd see why. And I think I shall. That girl started it all up again."

He leaned across the table and laid his hand on my arm. His eyes glinted encouragingly at me. "Cheer up, old man! You're not in for anything

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sordid. But curious—oh, very, very curious! Yes, I think, without vanity, I may say *very* curious. . . . I meant what I said just now, coming out of the theatre. There aren't but three things worth while—and I mayn't have them. I mayn't fight, because I might get killed before I've a right to; I don't drink, for the sake of the paltry hours that might be subtracted from the sum of my years if I did; and, being married, I naturally can't very well make love. Can I?" He turned on me with such a tone of ingenuous query that I wondered if it was a joke, after all.

I tried to be cynical. "That depends . . ."

"Oh, no, it doesn't!" It was the old Chalmers who smiled at me—ingratiating, youthful, adventurous, gay. I had often wondered why Chalmers looked adventurous, his habits being, if ever any man's were, regular to the point of monotony. It occurred to me now that perhaps he looked adventurous because he had had his adventure already. In any case, it was very satisfactory to find at last something in his life that matched with the look in his eyes—something that would take the curse off his even temperament and equable ways.

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"Very, very curious," he repeated. "And all these years I've wanted to tell somebody, just in case I should drop out suddenly. I've left written instructions, but I should really like some one to understand. It's all rather preposterous."

"It's preposterous that you should suddenly be married."

"Yes—of course. Well—I've got on pretty well, and I'd rather you didn't mention it to any of the others. But if anything should turn up, you can say you knew it all along."

"Fire ahead."

On the strength of the narrative about to come, I ordered another high-ball. Sometimes you want something to fiddle with, something to intervene between you and your friend when it is hard for eyes to meet. But he had promised me that it should be nothing sordid, and when the drink came I set it trustfully to one side—in reserve, as it were.

"Time was, when I knocked about the world a bit. My parents were dead, I had no close kin, and there was money enough to do what I wanted to, provided I wanted something modest. I had a

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great notion, when I came out of Göttingen, of a *wanderjahr*. Only I was determined it shouldn't be hackneyed. There was a good deal of Wilhelm Meister in it, all the same, with a strong dash of Heine. I fancied myself, rather, at that time; wanted to be different—like every other young pilgrim. I didn't want the common fate—not I. I hadn't any grievance against the world, because I had a complete faith in the world's giving me what I wanted, in the end. But I distinctly remember promising myself to be remarkable. I shan't, of course, unless there is something in spectrum analysis. I used to quote Heine to myself:

'Du stolzes Herz, du hast es ja gewollt!
Du wolltest glücklich sein, unendlich glücklich,
Oder unendlich elend, stolzes Herz,
Und jetzo bist du elend.'

Of course, I never believed that I should be 'unendlich elend,' but I should have preferred that to anything mediocre. At that age—you know what we're like. The man who would look at the stars by daylight and tumbled into the well. That's us, to the life.

"I met her in a villa above Ravello. Some charming

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French people—or, at least, Monsieur was French, though Madame and the money were American—were keeping guard over her. The American wife had known her somewhere, and was being good to her in her great misfortune. I won't go into explanations of how I came to frequent their villa. They were among the scores of people I had met and known in this or that pleasant, casual way. I used to go up and dine with them; I prolonged the Italian interlude in my *wanderjahr*, more or less for the sake of doing so. I had notions of going on to Egypt, but there was time enough for that. I stayed on even more because I liked the villa—an old Saracen stronghold on the edge of the Mediterranean, modernized into comfort—than because I liked them, though they were pleasant enough.

"At first I wished the girl were not there. She never talked; she was just a stiff figure, swathed in black up to her throat, sitting day by day almost motionless on a parapet. She was a harsh note. Wherever you were, she was in the middle distance, a black figure looking out to sea. It didn't take many days for her to get on my nerves. She was like

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a portent. I fancy she got on theirs, too, but they were helpless. I gathered that Madame C. had a good deal of talk with her daily, in hours when they were alone; and before very long she permitted me to share her perplexities. She didn't want to desert her young friend; but the girl seemed to have sunk into a kind of apathy. She thought, perhaps, a specialist ought to see her. A very American touch, that! Unluckily, the girl had no close kin; there was no one to turn her over to officially.

"Before long, I knew the whole story. The young lady's fiancé was a civil engineer, and had been employed by Portuguese interests in East Africa. He had gone into the interior—more or less—on a job for the Nyassa Company: headquarters, Mozambique. There was supposed to be money in it, because the Portuguese had been growing ashamed of their colonial reputation, and had been bucking up to some extent. Hence the job with the Nyassa Company. She had wanted to go out with him, but he would not permit it. Quite right, too. Mozambique's no place for a woman—or Lourenço Marques, either. *I* know. Damn their yellow, half-breed souls! . . .

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She had been waiting for him to finish his job in the interior, and come home to marry her. The date of their marriage, I imagine, had not been very far off.

"Suddenly, letters had ceased to come. There had been a horrid interval of months when there was no word out of Africa for her. Cablegrams were unanswered. The people at the other end must have been very unbusinesslike not to give her some inkling of the reason why they couldn't deliver them. I suppose it was the uncertainty. There he was, up on the verge of Rhodesia or beyond, prospecting, surveying, exploring: it was quite on the cards that he should lose his way, or be infinitely delayed, or fail somehow of his communications with headquarters on the coast. Beastly months for her, anyhow! Then letters did come. I never saw any of them, but I can imagine just the awkward vocabulary of them: a Portuguese head clerk in Mozambique trying to break it to her ornately that her man had died of fever up-country. Can't you imagine those letters —in quaint, bad English, on thin paper, worn to utter limpness and poverty with being clutched

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and carried and cried over? I never saw them, but I can.

"Well—I don't need to go into it all. Indeed, there were many details that Madame C. had forgotten, and that she naturally couldn't ask the girl to refresh her memory of for my benefit. What was troubling Madame was the girl's condition. Apparently, she had loved the man consumingly, and considered herself virtually dead—entirely negligible at least, as pitiful and worthless a thing as a child-widow in India. But you've noticed, perhaps, that the very humble are sometimes positively overweening about some special thing. The damned worms *won't* turn—any more than if they were elephants in the path! And so it was with her.

"She was determined to go out and fetch his body home. The people in Mozambique had to confess that they didn't know where those sacred remains were. The epidemic had run through the little camp, and, by the time the man himself had keeled over, the few natives that were left hadn't nerve enough to do anything for him. They remembered him, raving with fever and dropping among the corpses. A few,

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who were not already stricken, got away—probably considering that there was a lively curse on his immediate neighborhood. There had been complete demoralization. A few of them had eventually strayed back, as I said, joining any one who would take them home. Their casual employments delayed them a good deal, and by the time they turned in a report—to use formal language in a case where it is a sore misfit—there was nothing to be done. I didn't get this from Madame C.; I got it from her, later, when she told me everything she knew about it. But I put it in here, which is, after all, where it belongs."

Chalmers stopped—he had been talking steadily—and lighted a cigarette. I took the opportunity to sip a little whiskey. Through his introduction, I had been staring at him fixedly. My own cigarette had burned to ashes in my fingers; when I felt the spark touch them, I dropped the thing, still without looking at it, into the tray. He hunched his shoulders in the speckled brown coat and bent forward, his arms folded on the table. The little movement of his head from side to side was very like a tortoise.

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"Well, you see . . . of course she couldn't go alone, and of course there was no one to see her through a thing like that. I am sure she hadn't money enough to pay any one for going with her. If she had tried to go, she wouldn't have succeeded in doing much except get into the newspapers. She had sense enough to realize it, or the C.'s had sense enough to make her. But if she couldn't do that, she wouldn't do anything else. She simply sat and brooded, looking seaward. She apparently intended, at least, not to let go of her idea. She may have had some notion of mesmerizing the universe with her obsession—just by sitting tight and never, for a moment, thinking of anything else. There she sat, anyhow, and Madame C. sent out her doves in vain. They all came back from the parapet, drenched with Mediterranean spray. So it went on. The girl might have been watching for some fabulous creature to rise up from the waves and take her to her goal. She would cheerfully have embarked for East Africa on a dolphin, I think. At all events, she wouldn't leave her parapet, she wouldn't leave the villa, she wouldn't descend to the conventional plane. I don't mean that she

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didn't talk like a sane woman; I mean only that she sat at the heart of her obsession, and that when you came within a few feet of her you knocked up against it, almost tangibly. A queer thing to meet, day after day. . . . It ended by my being distinctly impressed.

"Very like the girl in the play! Just the same blonde vagueness, just the same effect of being cast inevitably for an unimportant, a merely supplementary part. But one is never fooled twice by that sort of thing. I tell you Maude Lansing will find herself some day doing chambermaid to that girl's heroine! If I was impressed, it was by the *cul-de-sac* she had got herself into. She couldn't go forward, and she wouldn't go back. She sat there, waiting for the world to change. In the end—after Madame C. had wrung her hands for your benefit a few hundred times—you began to damn the world for not changing. It seemed to be up to the perverse elements to stop the regular business of the cosmos and waft her to her goal.

"I could hardly have talked to her about anything but her plight. It was a week or two before I

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talked to her at all; but, in the end, I found that if I wanted to continue to come to the villa, I should have to brave that presence on the parapet—domesticate myself in that pervasive and most logical gloom. So I did. She was a positive creature; there wasn't the faintest hint of apology or deprecation in her manner. She would see you on business, and only on business—the business being her tragedy. Don't misunderstand—" (Chalmers frowned a little as he looked at me.) "She was neither lachrymose nor hard; she was just infinitely and quite decently preoccupied with her one desire and her helplessness to achieve it. She didn't magnify herself. It isn't magnifying yourself to want a proper funeral for the person you love, is it? She was even grateful for sympathy, though she didn't want a stream of words poured out over her. She—she was an awfully good sort."

Chalmers dug his cigarette-end almost viciously into the tray, and watched the smoke go out. We both watched the smoke go out. . . .

"Before long, we had talked together a good deal, especially during the hour before dinner, when the

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sun and the sea were so miraculous that any other miracle seemed possible. Such easy waters to cross, they looked, in the sunset light! You forgot the blistering leagues beyond; you forgot that it took money and men and courage and endurance, and all kinds of things that are hard to come by, to get to the goal she was straining for. I suppose it wouldn't be honest to say that she ever passed her personal fervor on to me—I couldn't, in the nature of things, care so much about recovering that poor chap's bones as she did—but I did end by wishing with all my heart that I could help. Little by little it seemed a romantic thing to do—to go out searching for the spot where he had died. Of course, getting the bones themselves, except for extraordinary luck, was all moonshine; but she didn't see that, and her blindness affected me. Finally, my *wanderjahr* began to shape itself to new horizons. Why shouldn't I have a try? . . . I dare say I posed a little as a paladin, though not, I hope, to her. Anyhow, I decided to broach it.

"I don't suppose you can understand it—any of it—for the simple reason that I can't describe her.

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She was the kind of person who sees very clearly the difference between the possible and the impossible; who never attempts anything but the possible; yet who sets every one about her itching to attain the impossible. Not 'for her sake,' in the conventional sense; no, not that at all. Simply, she set before you so clearly the reason why a thing couldn't be done that you longed to confute her, just as you sometimes long to confute fate. She was as convincing and as maddening as a natural law. Each of us, sooner or later, has tried to get the better of some little habit of the universe. You felt like saying: 'Stop looking like that; I'll do it—see if I don't.'

"That was the spirit in which I went to her, late one afternoon, on her parapet. The C.'s had been away all day and were not to return until evening. Madame C. had exasperated me the night before by proposing, quite baldly and kindly, that the girl be decoyed into a sanatorium. The C.'s couldn't keep her much longer—they were off for Biskra—and it was up to me. I had lain awake half the night, exploring the last recesses of disaster into which my idea might lead me; I had sailed far out on the bright

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waters all day, perfecting my courage. I could have written as bitter a little allegory about it all as Heine himself. Secretly, in a tawdry corner of my mind, I thought Wilhelm Meister was a poor stick compared with me. But it was honest romance; I was willing to pay."

I finished my whiskey as Chalmers's voice dropped and died down, and he busied himself a little nervously with lighting a pipe. His green eyes had flecks of brown in them. Once more, in the speckled brown figure opposite me, I saw the tortoise beyond the reach of biology, which upholds the world, which carries the burden of all human flesh and spirit.

"I told her that I was ready to go; that I could scrape together enough money for the expedition without entirely impoverishing myself. My figures hadn't been quite so reassuring as that when I totted them up on a piece of hotel paper at dawn, but at least I had left magnificent margins for everything.

"She smiled—I had never seen her smile before, and at the moment it made her thanks seem profuse—but she shook her head. She was beautifully simple about it. I liked her for that.

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"'It wouldn't do. Not that it isn't divinely good of you! But, you see, the point is that—' she stopped.

"'Well?' My heart was beating hard. I had become enamored of my idea. I no more wanted to be baulked than she did.

"'The point has always been that I should go myself.'

"'Then go yourself!'

"'Carrying off all your money? I can't—Don Quixote.' There was nothing playful in her tone; and she had me all the more because there wasn't. She was merely registering facts. Even the 'Don Quixote' was, to her mind, a fact that she was registering. She was splendidly literal.

"'Come with me. I don't propose that you should go alone.'

"She frowned a little; and in that frown I read all the weariness of the hours of past talk with Madame C. Presently she looked up at me, very kindly, a little questioningly, as if for the first time my personality in itself interested her.

"'You know that—even for me—that is impossible.'

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"I knew what she meant: that she would have been ready for any abnegation, being, herself, as I have said, negligible; but that the world must be able to pick no flaw in the rites paid to the shade.

"'If you will marry me, it is not impossible.'

"That is what I said—just like that. I had determined that nothing should be an obstacle. She didn't change her posture or her expression by the fraction of a millimetre. She looked silently past me at the ilexes as if she had not heard. But she had heard. I think that at that moment—no, I don't except all that came after—I touched the highest point of my romance. . . . She thought for a moment or two while I waited. I suppose she was considering what the world would say to that, and deciding that the world would have no right to say anything; that it would be, and legitimately so, between her and me. The dead themselves, of course, can be trusted to understand. It didn't take her long—you see she was a girl of one idea, and of one idea only.

"'Very well, I will marry you.' The words came as simply from her lips as any others. We didn't at that time, or at any time before our marriage, have any

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discussion of the extremely—shall I say?—individual nature of our relation. That was the one thing we couldn't have talked of. It would have been—you see?—quite impossible for either to imply, by approaching the subject, that the other perhaps didn't understand. I couldn't even be so crass as to say: 'Look here, my dear girl, of course I quite recognize that you don't in any sense belong to me'; or she be so crass as to say in turn: 'I know it.' No: I suppose I have never been so near the summit as I was that evening after she had 'accepted' me, and we had both silently laid our freedom on the altar of that dead man. Neither of us realized all the inevitable practical results of such a compact. We simply thought we had thrown the ultimate sufficing sop to Cerberus, and that all our lives we should hear him contentedly crunching it. I am quite sure that her mind turned as blank a face to the future as mine. Quite."

His voice rang authoritatively across the table. I said nothing. What could I say? What is the proper greeting when you cross the threshold of such a habitation? I offered him a silence that was at least respectful.

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"Well, I won't bore you with too many details. She pulled herself together and said her visit must end. We did not tell the C.'s. We merely let them get off to Tunis. It would not have been easy for her to explain to Madame C. all the things that we had never condescended to explain to each other. She was a Catholic, by the way. We were married by a parish priest in—no, on second thoughts, I won't even tell you where. The place has kept the secret hitherto. It is better so. I left her at once to make arrangements for the quest. It took some time and a good deal of frenzied journeying to realize on my securities. I gave her a letter of credit, so that she could be in all incidental ways independent of me. That was necessary, because I was to go out to Mozambique first, and she was to follow only when I sent for her. Very soon, you see, I began to realize the practical inconveniences of travelling with a woman who bears your name and who is a total stranger to you. It's damned expensive, for one thing." Chalmers's smile was nearer the authentic gleam of irony than anything I had seen before during the evening.

"Well, I went. I interviewed the proper people; I

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saw one of the creatures who knew the spot where our man had died. Eventually I arranged the expedition. Then I cabled for her. She took the *Dunvegan Castle* at Naples. By the time I met her at the steamer, she had grown incredible to me. I could more easily have believed her a sharer in some half-forgotten light adventure than my duly registered wife. She was unreal to me, a figure recurring inexplicably in a dream, a memory—of exactly what sort I was not quite sure. My feet lagged along the pier. . . . She soon set all that straight. I had wondered if the sop to Cerberus would require our seeming to kiss. She managed it somehow so that no stage kiss was necessary. She dissipated the funk into which I had fallen, by practical questions and preoccupations; she came upon my fever like a cool breeze off the sea. She had made her point; she had achieved her miracle; and in every incidental way, little and big, she could afford to show what a serviceable soul she was. She was a good thing to have about. There were times when the situation got on my nerves, in Mozambique, before we started. It's such a small hole that we seemed always to be bumping into each

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other. I couldn't make out her private attitude towards me; I used to wonder if she had any, or if she simply thought of me as a courier in her own class. I was so endlessly occupied with engaging men and beasts and camping kit and supplies—what was I but a courier? The paladin idea was fading a little; though now and then, at night, I'd look up at the Southern Cross and let the strangeness of the thing convince me all over again. I don't think I wanted anything so commonplace as gratitude from her; but I did want in her some sense of the strangeness of our alliance, with all the things it left unsaid. Perhaps I wanted her to realize that not every man would have responded so quickly to the call of impersonal romance. I can look back on all that egotism of youth and despise it; but there's something not wholly ignoble in an egotism that wants only good fame with one's self and one's secret collaborator. Anyhow, there were moments when my dedication seemed solemn; just as there were other moments when I seemed like an inadequate tenor in a comic opera. I never knew just how she hovered between those two conceptions. We were destined to see each other

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only by lightning-flashes—never once in the clear light of day.

"I can't tell you how I came to hate the Portuguese before we left that mean little hole. You laughed at me once for rending Blakely to shreds over Camoëns. I've read Camoëns in my day and hated him, as if something in me had known beforehand that I was eventually to have good reason to loathe every syllable of that damned language. My stock is Southern, too—South Carolina—and you can imagine how I enjoyed seeing, at every turn, the nigger the better man. Portugal ought to be wiped off the map of Africa.

"Well—I got our arrangements made as well as I could. It was lucky I had left handsome margins for everything, because the graft was sickening. They wouldn't let your own approved consignments leave the dock without your handing out cash to at least three yellow dogs that called themselves officials. I had hoped to find some sort of female servant for her—I shook at the thought of having her go off on a trip like that without another woman to do things for her that I, in the circumstances, couldn't very

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well do. But there wasn't a wench of either color or any of the intervening shades that a nice woman could have had about her. She was very plucky about it all. As I say, she had made her great point, and didn't care. The morning we started, she stuck a gentian in my buttonhole and another in hers—and she smiled. A smile of hers carried very far. And so we started.

"I needn't give you the details of our trip. People write books about that sort of thing; keep diaries of their mishaps, and how Umgalooloo or Ishbosheth or some other valuable assistant stole a bandanna handkerchief and had to be mulcted of a day's pay—all very interesting to somebody, no doubt. To tell the truth, the concrete details maddened me; and we seemed to live wholly in concrete terms of the smallest. I, who had planned for my *wanderjahr* a colossal, an almost forbidden intimacy with Platonic abstractions! I had always rather meant to go in for biology eventually, but I got over that in Africa; we were much too near the lower forms of life. And to this day, as you well know, I can't bear hearing Harry Dawes talk about folk-lore.

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He's driven me home from the club a good many nights."

I caught my breath. It was almost uncanny, the way Chalmers's little idiosyncrasies were explaining themselves, bit by bit. I felt the cold wind of a deterministic law blowing over my shoulder—as cold as Calvinism. I had always loved temperament and its vagaries. Now I wasn't sure I wanted the light in Chalmers's eyes explained, to the last gleam. Mightn't any of us ever be inexplicable and irresponsible and delightful?

"Of course they had given us maps in Mozambique—not official ones, oh, no! Those would have come too high. The Nyassa Company had to pretend to be amiable, but they didn't fork out anything they didn't have to. Small loss the official maps were, I fancy; but those we had weren't much good. It wasn't, however, a difficult journey to make, from that point of view, and the cheerful savage who had abandoned our hero swore he knew where to take us. In eight weeks, we reached the spot that he declared to be the scene of the death from fever. I dare say he was right; he knew the villages along the way; he

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had described the topography, more or less, before we started, and it tallied. We pitched camp and spent three horrible days there. It is needless to say that we might as well have hunted for the poor fellow's bones under the parapet at Ravello. I saw—and if you'll believe me, I positively hadn't seen before—what moonshine it all was. She ought to have been put to bed and made to pray God to make her a good girl, before she dragged anybody—even me—out on such a wild-goose chase as that. There wasn't a relic—except certain signs of some one's having cleared ground there before, and one or two indescribable fragments, picked up within a five-hundred-yard radius, that might have been parts of tin cans. Why should there have been? If there had been any plunder, natives would have found and taken it, as they would inevitably have removed and destroyed any corporal vestiges out of sheer superstition and hostility. I had learned their little ways, since Ravello. The rank soil in the wet season would have done the rest. I wondered—cruelly, no doubt—whether she had expected him to bury himself with a cairn atop and a few note-books (locked up in a

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despatch-box) decorously waiting for her in his grave. On the strength of the savage's positive declaration that at such a distance—two days—from the last village, beyond such a stream, beneath such and such a clump of trees, he had seen the white man fall in the last delirium, she searched the place, as you might say, with a microscope. I thought it extremely likely that the fellow was lying for the sake of our pay, but I had to admit that I couldn't prove it. Certainly, his information was the only thing we could reasonably go on; we couldn't invest all Portuguese East Africa with an army and set them to digging up every square inch of soil in that God-forsaken country. If this clue failed, we could only return. But there was a moment when, in her baffled anguish, I think she could have taken a good close-range shot at the inscrutable nigger who had been with him, and had left him, and could not even bring us to his body. The girl on the stage to-night was like that, though you don't believe it. Vague, indeed! Maude Lansing's a fool if she keeps her on.

"You see"—Chalmers shifted his position and, ever so little, his tone of voice. It was extraordinary

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how straight he went with his story, considering that he had never told it before. He seemed to have dragged it out from some receptacle, intact, not a thread frayed, in perfect order, ready to spread before me. The pattern was as clear as if it were just off the torturesome loom. He seemed to know it by heart.

"You see"—he went on—"she had been changing steadily, all through that march of ours. You would have said that the tropical sun had forced her growth. She had been a cold, immature thing in Italy—passions dormant and sealed. Now they had worked their way up to the surface and were just beneath the skin. She *would* have shot the nigger. Before, I suppose, she had lived with ideas only; even *he* must have been chiefly an idea, though a tremendous one. The daily contact with all sorts of unsuspected facts, the hopeless crudeness of the hinterlands most of us never get into, had worked on her. There may be something subtle in the tropics—people talk as if there were. I should say they were no more subtle than the slums. The body demands a hundred things, and it becomes a matter of the utmost moment whether you get them for it or not.

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You can't achieve subtlety until the body is lulled. That life has complications of its own; but I shouldn't call it subtle. Very far from it. And savages make you feel that it's subtlety enough merely to have a white skin; there's something irrelevant and ignoble in pushing subtlety further. In the end the sun wears you out, I suppose, and makes you want nothing very much; but at first it merely makes it intolerable not to have everything on the very instant. . . . I merely meant to explain that she was a changed creature—a good sport always, but inclined to impatiences, angers, delights, and fervors that I fancy she had never felt before. Her tongue was loosed; she was lyric about cool water, violent about native trickeries. I don't mean—Heaven forbid!—that she was vulgar. She had a sweet distinction all her own. She was merely real and varied and vital. And I dare say the fundamental formality of our relation was all the subtlety we could stand. It put an edge on everything.

"We were very near the line of Rhodesia, and for various reasons we decided to cross over and come down far enough south through British territory to

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strike the Zambesi and its boats. If there was any information to be picked up, we should be more likely to find it in that direction than by going back the way we had come, which was utterly barren of clues. I had reason to suppose that the others who had survived the fever had gone on to the Rhodesian villages. We started in the cool of dawn, and I ought to say that there were no backward glances on her part. She was convinced that there was nothing in that precise spot for her; and I think she had hope of finding something in the miles just beyond. I could see that she did not more than half believe the identifications of the negro who had been on the earlier expedition. True, his guttural gibberish did not sound like information; but, after all, he was the only link we had with that supreme and sordid adventure. We pushed on."

Chalmers threw back his head and stretched his arms, but went on presently in a more vibrant, a more intimately reminiscent tone. The club was nearly empty—it was getting on for midnight. I seemed to myself to be quite alone with the tortoise that upheld the world.

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"I suppose this is the point in the narrative to say a rather difficult thing—though it ought to be clear that I've no cause or wish to paint myself anything but the mottled color most of us are. I spoke of what the tropics had done to her: fulfilled her in all kinds of ways. We had strange talks by the fire at night, moving on, after the necessary practical discussions, into regions of pure emotion. The emotion was all over the incidents we encountered; we marshalled our facts and made our decisions, and then leaned back and generalized with passion. Whatever Africa had done to her inwardly, it had at least taught her to talk. I had never had any particular sense of her being on guard—there *was*, from the very first, something strange and delicate in the flavor of our understanding—but now I had the sense of her being specifically and gloriously off her guard. We seemed to know each other awfully well." Chalmers's face, as he looked down at his pipe-bowl, was curiously boyish for an instant. He might have been speaking of a childhood playmate.

"Put it that I fell in love with her. I don't choose to analyze my feeling more than that. There was

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everything in it to make me the prey of a passion for her—so long as we hadn't begun, in Mozambique, by hating each other. She was straight, she was fine, she was thoroughly good; she was also, in her unfailing freshness and her astonishing health, infinitely desirable. By the law of every land she was my wife. There wasn't a barrier between us except the frail one built of things that had never been said. Of course, I knew that, to her, the barrier doubtless looked insuperable. She considered herself the inalienable property of the man whose bones we were fantastically hunting for. Well: can't you see that that very fact was peculiarly constructed to whet my hunger? It was maddening to know that shadows could effectually keep two strong, sinewy creatures apart. Our utter isolation in our adventure flung us upon each other.

"'Doch es tritt ein styg'scher Schatten
Nächtlich zwischen mich und ihn.'

"One night she had a bad dream; she moaned and cried out in her sleep, and I had to stand outside her tent and listen, while she woke and wept and finally

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quieted down with little sobs like a child's. I couldn't even go in and lay my hand on her forehead to soothe her."

He shook his head, and over his face crept the shadow of the burdened.

"Well, that was what I was in for, and I knew I was in for it as long as I should desire her. Finally, I only prayed that we might get safely back to Mozambique, where I could leave her forever. I knew that before my fever ebbed, it would rise in a horrid flood. I wanted her desperately; I should want her more desperately before I got through with it; and I had, for my honor's sake, not to let her know. It's odd how many situations there are in life that make it an insult to tell a woman you love her. But I think you'll agree with me that this is rather an extraordinary case of it.

"All this time, I hadn't the faintest inkling of what she felt: whether she knew, or what she would have thought of me if she had known. There's something tremendous in the power of ideas. Think of how easy it would have been for me—I won't say to take what I wanted, though against that background it wouldn't

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have seemed such a preposterous thing to do—to insist on her talking it out with me, some night by the fire; how little she could have turned her back on me if I had wanted to ask her a question. But I was as tongue-tied as if we had been in a drawing-room, surrounded with all the paraphernalia of chaperonage. And yet sometimes it didn't seem possible, with her face and her speech changing like that, week by week, that there shouldn't be some change in it for me.

"I often wondered if she ever had moments, as I did, of thinking that that man had never lived. But I could only go on assuming that she gave him every thought she had. I never knew, by the way, what she felt—she never told me. I said, a little while back, that we never saw each other in the clear light of day—only in lightning-flashes. In spite of our semblance of intimacy, that was true. For when a man is obsessed with the notion of wanting to make very definite love to a woman, her impersonal conversation is a kind of haze at best. I know that we talked; but I know that, after the fiasco, when we ate our meals, when we rode side by side along those unspeakable trails, when we sat by the fire in the eve-

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ning, I hardly knew or cared what we talked of. I kept a kind of office in my brain quite tidy for the transaction of business; the rest was just a sort of House of Usher where I wandered, wanting her. By the time we struck the first Rhodesian village, I didn't even feel sure I could hold my tongue all the way south and east again. I only prayed to God to deliver me from being an utter and unspeakable brute. That was what my romance had led me to—that I was hanging on to common decency by the eyelids!

"You see, there was added to my most inconvenient and unfitting passion for the girl all the psychology of return from a lost battle-field—if you could in name so dignify that pitiful clearing which was our frustration. Everything was over, and why the devil shouldn't something else begin? That was the refrain my blood kept pounding out. I dare say you don't understand—you live among the civilized, and are used to reckoning with shadows. It's different out there on the well-nigh uninhabited veldt. A platitude, I know. Funny how people despise platitudes, when they're usually the truest things

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going! A thing has to be pretty true before it gets to be a platitude at all. Humph!

"We struck into northeastern Rhodesia—days and days over the veldt; and after the rains it was blooming like the rose. Gladiolus everywhere—'white man's country, past disputing.' No 'baked karroo' there. Pretty starkly uninhabited, though. Of course, we were hundreds of miles north of the mines and the other activities on the edge of the Transvaal. Mashonaland, it would really be more properly called; and it describes it better, sounds wilder—as it was. We were heading west across the tail of Nyassa, and then south—to the Zambesi or the railroad, it didn't much matter which. That man was as lost to us, every corporal vestige of him, as if his ashes had been scattered like Wycliffe's. But there on the rampart above Ravello both she and I had felt that the search was imperative: I no less than she. We were both pretty young."

His head dropped on his breast for a moment. He looked as if he felt his burden. I suppose the tortoise sometimes wonders why. . . .

"Then, one afternoon, we dropped into the heart

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of a storm—tropical thunder, tropical lightning, skies blacker than you've ever seen, a wind that churned the heavens into a pot of inky broth. I had been wondering, for days, what we should do when we struck something besides the eternal huddled villages of the natives, with their tobacco-plots and mealie-fields, their stupid curiosities, their impudent demands for gifts—something more like a house, people you could count people, with a touch of white in their complexions. Strange coincidence, that it was by the real lightning-flash that, for the only time in my life, I saw her clear; strange, too, that the revelation should have come on the heels of our first approach to anything like civilization. It was only the plantation of a man who had made his little pile by trading in Kimberley, and had trekked up to the edge of the wilderness to live there in peace with his aged wife, and his cattle, and the things that without too much trouble he could coax out of the good-humored soil. His establishment was the first earnest of European activities seething somewhat to the southward; the first reminder of Europe that we had had since leaving the last Portuguese outpost on the way to the

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Nyassa. The trip had not been hard, as such trips go: we had run into no wars; no famine or drought or disease had visited us. We had been in luck; for I was a shocking amateur, and anything like a real expedition I could not have managed, of course. Yet, even so, I had been straining my eyes for the sight of a white man; for some form of life that more nearly suited my definition of 'colonial.'

"And so we stumbled into his compound at eight in the evening, after endless floundering about in the storm. We had had to dismount from our donkeys and lead the frightened beasts by the bridle. Eventually we could discard them for horses or ox-carts, but for a little while still we might need them, and we clung to them, though the temptation was to let them go—with a kick."

Chalmers hesitated. "Why do I find it so confoundedly hard to come at? I'm not writing a diary of accidents and self-congratulations like the explorer fellows. The only point in the whole thing is just what I can't manage to bring out!" He mused for a moment. "The whole place white with hail after the storm . . . thick on the thatch of the big,

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rambling house . . . the verandah eaves dripping . . . then the rain stopping, and a miraculous silence after the tumult . . . no light anywhere except long, low, continual flashes on the horizon at the edge of the veldt—and then she came out, dressed in something of the poor old vrouw's that hung about her lovely, slim figure like a carnival joke. I was wondering thickly where I should spend the night. I had introduced her as my wife, of course . . . and they had muttered something about the other room's being in use. The good old souls had gone off to bed with the ceasing of the storm, after our little caravan was housed down in the farm niggers' quarters. But naturally I couldn't have explained to them, anyhow. . . . The lightning was about as regular as a guttering candle set in a draught—but about a thousand candle-power when it did come. And, by one apocalyptic flash, I saw her face. She didn't say anything; she merely laid her hand on my shoulder. And I, who had been bursting with the wish to talk, to tell her, to lay my head on her knees and weep, out of pure self-pity and desire—all those cub-like emotions—didn't say any-

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thing either. I only saw—in that one flash—the working of her lips, the prophetic brilliancy of her eyes. We turned and went into the house without a word. She wanted me, too; that was what it came to. Other things being equal, the utter isolation of a man and a woman must do one of two things—must put a burning fire or the polar ice between them. I knew what it had done to me; I hadn't been able to guess what it had done to her. I had rather been betting on the polar ice."

Chalmers ruffled both hands through his hair and leaned back from the table. His mouth took on a legal twist. "It's the only thing I blame myself for—bar all the egotism that youth has to slough, and that I think I sloughed forever before I reached the damned coast. I ought to have known that half her impulse was the mere clinging of the frightened child, and the other half the strangeness of our journey, which made us both feel that all laws had ceased to work and that all signs had failed. I ought to have reflected, to have put her off, to have made sure, before I ever took her into my arms. And yet I'm glad I didn't—though I'm ashamed of

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being glad. Even then, you know, I didn't envisage the rest of life. I still thought, as for months I had thought, that there could be no conventional future for that adventure. When my curious *wanderjahr* was over, I expected to die. And I wanted to have some other face than the barren visage of Romance —the painted hussy!—press itself to mine before I went out. I got it; and I'm not yet over being glad, though it has made a coil that grows tighter rather than looser with the years."

I made no answer. There was nothing to say. He had not got to the end, and until the end what was there for me to do but light another weary cigarette, and summon all the sympathy I could to my non-committal eyes? On the face of it, it was merely an extraordinary situation in which, if a man were once caught, he could do little—a new and singular kind of hard-luck story. But, as he told it, with those tones, those inflections, those stresses, he certainly did not seem to be painting himself *en beau*. I looked at the patient figure opposite me—Chalmers always seemed pre-eminently patient—and, for very perplexity, held my tongue.

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"The next morning, I got breakfast early and went to see about my men and beasts. I was a little afraid of finding the men drunk, but they weren't—only full-fed and lazy and half mutinous. The guide who had led us to the historic spot had vanished—deserted in the night, with half his pay owing him. No one in that black crew could explain. We had had desertions before, and I should have considered us well enough off simply with one coast nigger the less, if he hadn't been my interpreter as well. There were very few things I could say to the others without him, and, though we were out of the woods, we were by no means done with our retinue. I strode back to the house in a fine rage. I think I minded the inconvenience most, since it would be the inconvenience that would most affect her. Frankly, you see, I couldn't suppose she felt, any longer, a special concern with that particular black sample of human disloyalty.

"When I entered the house, I saw her at once. Her back was turned to me, and she was talking with a man I had not hitherto seen—evidently some inmate of the house whom we had not encountered

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the previous evening. The other room had been in use, I reflected, in a flash. He was stretched on a ramshackle sofa with some sort of animal skin thrown over him. He—but I won't describe him. I know every feature of his face, though I saw him, all told, not more than five minutes, and have never seen him since. I have a notion"—Chalmers's voice grew very precise, and his mouth looked more legal than ever—"that, when he wasn't pulled down with a long illness and protracted suffering, he would be very good-looking. As it was, he was unhealthy white, like the wrong kind of ghost. One arm was quite limp.

"At the instant I didn't place him—naturally! But as soon as she turned her face to me, I did. Only one thing could have induced that look of horror—horror in every strained feature, like the mask of some one who has seen the Medusa. I started to her, but stopped almost before I started; for I saw immediately that I was the Gorgon. It was for me that her face had changed. God knows what, two minutes before, her face had been saying to that half-lifeless form. It was about *me* that she

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felt like that. Since, with all the years to work it out in, I've seen why; but just at the moment I was overwhelmed. She sat down in a chair and covered her face with her hands. I heard the man babbling tragic and insignificant details. I can't say I listened, but before I could pull myself together and leave, I caught mention of fever, accident, loss of memory, broken limbs, miraculous co-operation of fate for good and evil alike—the whole mad history, I suppose, from his side, of the past year. I have sometimes wished I had caught it more clearly, but just then I could take in nothing except the insulting fact that this was the man whose grave we had not found. That was what her face had told me in that horrid instant. I never saw her face again. It was still bowed on her hands when I went out of the door.

"I don't know how I got off—I don't remember. I suppose I had the maniac's speed. If I hadn't been beside myself, I think I could recall more of what I did. The patriarchal creature under whose roof it had all happened helped me. I think I gave him a good many directions about the negroes and

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the kit. Or I may have paid them off, myself. I honestly don't know. I know that I left nearly all of my money with him, and started off on horseback alone. I had a dull sense that I was causing her some practical difficulties, but I also had a very vivid sense that she would kill herself if she had to encounter me again. She had looked at me as if I were a monster from the mud. And the night before, on the verandah, in the lightning . . ."

Chalmers stopped and looked at me. The brilliancy had gone out of his eyes. He said nothing more.

"Well?" I asked finally.

"Well?" There came a wide shrug of the shoulders, a loosening of the lips. "I got back somehow. I seemed to be riding, day and night, straight to Hell. But eventually I got to Salisbury and took a train to Beira. It was immensely steadying to take a train. I think any more of the veldt would have driven me quite definitely mad." He stopped; then, in a moment, jerked out: "That's all."

"Do you mean that you've never heard anything more?"

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"Never a word. But I know that, eventually, she drew out every penny of her letter of credit. She had hardly dipped into it when we left Europe."

"Good God!" I don't know why I should have sat stolidly through the rest and have been bowled over by that one detail, but I was. It made the woman extraordinarily real.

"And of course she knows several places where a letter would reach me, if she ever had reason to write," he went on. "Perhaps you see now why I have to hang on. By holding my tongue, I've been grub-staking them in Arcadia, you might say—but, damn it, I know so little about it! The time might come . . ."

"Why haven't you divorced her long since?"

His face hardened. "Didn't I mention that she was a Catholic? We were married by the most orthodox *padre* imaginable. There's no divorce for her. She's the kind to chuck Heaven, perhaps, but not her church. And, unfortunately"—he spoke very slowly and meditatively—"our marriage, you see, just missed being the kind that can be annulled. 'Unfortunately,' I say, but, even now, I'm glad—

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damned glad. It's quite on the cards, you know, that some day some priest may send her back to me. I might divorce; she couldn't. So it seems decent for me not to."

"Well, of all the—" I got no further. The whole Laokoönesque group had now completed itself before me.

Chalmers leaned back and whistled a bar or two from *Rigoletto*. Then: "Never marry a Catholic, old man!" he said in his lightest voice. But immediately he bent forward and laid his hand on mine. "You do see why I have to hang on, don't you?"

I merely compressed my lips tightly, that no word should come.

"After all," he said, turning his head away, "I should like a chance to get back at Romance, some day. And the time may come—what with spectrum analysis and all."

I shook my head. "You love the woman still, Chalmers."

"Not I." His head-shake was more vehement than mine. "But I want to be on deck if anything

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should turn up. I want to see it through. At least—I can't quite see that I've the right to go out."

I sighed. Chalmers had always gone his own way; and certainly in this greatest matter he would be tenacious, if ever. He seemed for the moment to have forgotten me, and sat once more, his arms folded on the table, his shoulders hunched, as beneath a burden, in the speckled brown coat, his head moving slightly from side to side—again fantastically like the tortoise that bears up the world. I didn't quite know what to do with him.

Then a charitable impulse came to me. The bar, I knew, didn't close until one. I ordered up a bottle of brandy. When it came I poured out enough to set the brain of any abstemious man humming. Chalmers was still staring in front of him at the table. I wanted him to sleep that night at any cost. Pursuing my impulse, I pushed the glass across to him. "Here; you'd better take this," I said. He reached out his hand mechanically, and mechanically drank. I waited. The stuff had no visible effect on him. Five minutes later, I repeated the dose. As before, he obeyed me with a mechanical, an almost

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mesmerized implicitness. Then I took him home in a cab and put him to bed. I never told, myself, but it leaked out—he had such a bad hang-over—and I was much and enviously congratulated. You see, we had all tried, for five years, to get Chalmers to take a drink.

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THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

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THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

IT was like Hoyting to be lying up for repairs in Soerabaya when the Dorriens drifted by; like him to be there at the psychologic moment; like him, above all, not to follow up their trail for a solution, but to tack off into the China Sea to renew his acquaintance with belligerent Mongols. It was I, years later, at Marseilles, who supplied Hoyting with the last act of the play; and I can see his gray eyes narrowing above his glass of vermouth as, for once, he listened. I shall have to put it together as best I can, though I shall, as best I can, put Hoyting's part of it in his own mouth. I've learned a kind of mental stenography by dint of listening to him; and though it's unfair to quote a man inexactly, I'm not sure it isn't less unfair than inditing Hoyting's jerks and pauses, his zigzag structure. Some of the story, as I say, he got from me. That part—most of it—I'll give you in the beginning. After that, if only

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for the sake of one or two of his own phrases, I shall make shift to let him talk as he talked to me. If I could reproduce for you that evening at Marseilles—Hoyting, his arms folded on the café table, paying out his story unevenly, as if in response to unseen strains and unseen relaxations at the other end—oh, as if Dorrien himself had been fitfully pulling and letting go; and then the sharpening of the eyes, the shrug of the great shoulders, when I told him the end—if I could, I might let it go at that. But you who know Hoyting will know that I had to shape it; and you who don't might loathe the imperfectly visualized scene.

Science moves at an extraordinarily uneven gait. We laymen follow as best we can. I don't pretend to make a history of medical discoveries, and poor Dorrien's theories may have been exploded long since. The public knows only vain gossip of the laboratory's "expectations" until the serum is born. I don't even know how much he contributed, but I do know that at one moment terror-stricken multitudes were looking to him for help. He had been the last man, in college days, who seemed marked

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out for the work of discovery: easy-going, delighting in musical comedy, to which he listened with the least subtle laugh in the world. He married, at about thirty, the very worldly daughter of a public-spirited American family. There wasn't anything for two centuries, from witch-burning to slave-rescuing, the Hewells hadn't had their fingers in. The Hewell spinsters have always headed intense and short-lived leagues for the suppression of unsuspected evils or the maintenance of out-dated ideals. The Hewell men are bred to reform as the English race-horse is bred to the turf. Their marriages are apt to be bloodlessly tragic.

Agatha Hewell—that is, Agatha Dorrien—was a special case, very worldly, as I've said. She didn't care for money, but she cared for fame, which meant, she had the sense to see, marrying a clever man. She made herself rather absurd, when she came out, by dashing at celebrities; but she also made herself popular with her contemporaries by letting the dancing men alone. When she married Dorrien, she seemed likely to eat her cake and have it, too; for he was young and good-looking, and there could

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be by that time no question about his ability. She and Dorrien both danced a good deal in the earlier years of their marriage. The serious Hewells approved of him none the less, for he had interested himself pretty constantly, since his Johns Hopkins days, in tuberculosis, which suited their public spirit admirably. The Hewells found campaigns rather nasty work, but they loved legislation, and Dorrien was always appearing passionately before boards and commissions, and getting "machine" mayors to lift the submerged tenth into so many cubic feet of air. He had always a natural leaning, though, it was interesting to recall later, to the maladies of immigrants; and Ellis Island had more than once summoned him. He chafed a little, in the end, under the vocabularies of boards and commissions, and I once heard him say that he'd be damned if he'd lecture again to any woman's club, no matter if they built a sanatorium the next minute. He was flat against woman suffrage, and said so, but the Hewell aunts forgave him on account of his tuberculosis activity. They called it a crusade. Agatha said nothing.

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Mrs. Dorrien was inexhaustibly pretty in a white and gold type, all purity and lustre; and she wore endless French tea-gowns, each lovelier than the last. They doubtless explained Dorrien's sticking to his fat and fashionable practice when his desire was to this or that new disease out of Italy. Yet I've heard her take him lightly to task for letting the dust grow thick in his laboratory. She certainly didn't think she wanted money. Nor, I fancy, in any bloated and disproportionate way did she. She was, as I say, ambitious—muddle-headedly, sentimentally, but incurably ambitious; and she seemed always, I've been told, to be watching his career in the hope of its suddenly flaring into the spectacular. It was she, I've also been told, who defended Dorrien from outraged Hewells when he broke entirely with official tuberculosis and turned his attention publicly to leprosy. There had been one of the periodic "scares"; some respectable artisan in Kansas City had developed it quite unaccountably. There was a good deal of the yellow peril in the yellow journals. They sent for Dr. Dorrien. I've a notion that the Misses Hewell were almost reconciled to

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him in that moment. Mrs. Dorrien did not go to Kansas City with her husband. She stayed at home, and explained to every one that leprosy was really becoming a public menace, that the danger should be considered, that steps should be taken, especially that research should be subsidized.

It had been a chance current that had swept me for a little into the Dorriens' world, and my main stream of life soon swept me out of it. At the moment of my departure from America, the Kansas City scare was over, and Dr. Dorrien had still done nothing that one could legitimately present to one's wife as spectacular. That was all I knew of them for years—until I knew the last. The last set us all to wondering, and by an odd chance I once wondered aloud before Hoyting. "Oh, the Dorriens? Yes, of course, the Dorriens. I knew them."

That was all, and it sufficed. Whatever Hoyting knew was sure to be the right answer. It would take too long to expound Hoyting to those of you who don't know him. Those of you who do will understand my faith. He's like nothing so much, I've sometimes thought, as a badly tinkered craft plying

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between obscure and unsafe ports. Sometimes he carries junk, and sometimes treasure; you never know beforehand. But I always bargain for the cargo. Hoyting has wandered so much: the mere dust on the crazy little capstan may have blown from some unpronounceable paradise. He doesn't always know, himself; he "steams for steaming's sake," Hoyting does. Somewhere inside his lurching bulk is an inexhaustible hunger for life, which has made of two hemispheres an insufficient meal. For some of us he's an unfailing cache in the desert. Provided he has had life at first hand, the jackals are welcome to do the rest. So I had only to wait my moment. In Marseilles, that haven of ships, Hoyting's tongue would be loosed. I should not have to wait long.

"Vermouth," said Hoyting; "yes, just vermouth. I always did like Marseilles. Full of people who really want to get somewhere, and know how to go, and don't talk more than is necessary. Brindisi's disgusting. I never touch Brindisi if I can help it."

"The Dorriens." I held him to his promise.

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"Oh, the Dorriens. Yes. Funny, the kind of thing a woman who looks like that is sometimes willing to muck about in. She seemed like a good sport, too. Ever been in Turkestan? I suppose not. If you go to places in this world, you haven't time left for anything else. So very likely you never saw a Kirghiz nomad hunting on horseback with a golden eagle on his wrist. Using it like a falcon, you know. They go after wildish game—wolves and such. Ripping. But not very practical, after all. Mrs. Dorrien was a little like that. She was ripping, too. But I've always had a notion that Dorrien might have had better hunting with almost any other kind of woman.

"I don't understand modern medical science—scrapping with ultravisible germs that good may come. Blood is different: when you see that, it's your business to stop it anyhow. A flow of blood is the devil at war with man. You know it instinctively. I myself don't hold much with anything that doesn't come by instinct. And as for deciding things by theory! There wasn't a mouldering idea any one had held since the Christian era that Mrs. Dorrien didn't drag out of its grave to get help from. That

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was the trouble: all the mouldering ideas were knocking about together in her mind. And therefore, exit Dorrien.

"Do you know Soerabaya? No? It was there I saw them. I had known Dorrien long ago somewhere. There wasn't much of any one else in that crazy thing that called itself a hotel—kept by a Portuguese Jew named D'Acunha. It was in the town, mind you, not in the suburbs, and the guests ran accordingly. Very good drinks, and plenty of mosquito-netting, but everything else in the place that mosquito-netting wouldn't keep out. Mrs. Dorrien always dressed for dinner, I remember. Dorrien wasn't happy. She had come to please him, though just why to Soerabaya I never made out, and was always reminding him of it, and he wasn't pleased. They had left the little girl at home, and I dare say the mother wanted to get back to her. She kept saying she was afraid Aunt Emma wouldn't have Virginia's teeth properly straightened. Wonderful thing a woman is! Lizards climbing all round over the walls, and the eternal promise of a snake coiling up on the tail of her dress, and she'll look past it

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all with her far-sighted eyes and say she is afraid a safe little kid at home with steam-heat and a governess isn't having her teeth straightened.

"I didn't come in on the Dorriens' affairs at all at first, you understand. I was there on my own business, and I supposed they were. At least I supposed he was. I never could see what she got out of it: I'll swear she never looked at scenery, and there wasn't anything in the mucky little bazaars she wanted. Apparently they had no letters to European residents; or if they had, they didn't use them. If ever a woman wasn't meant for the tropics—" His voice trailed off for a little, then boomed out again, softly resonant, like a ship's gong going intermittently somewhere beyond in the offing. "I admired her more than a little. But I saw that Dorrien had no show. Women are apt to shout with the majority. How is a husband going to be a majority, if he takes a line of his own? Oh, Dorrien was down and out from the start.

"They must have been worrying along in Soerabaya for two weeks. I think Dorrien stayed on like a cross child who knows he's got to go home. He

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drags at his nurse's hand, and asks questions about every object they pass. He wasn't interested in the place, but at least it wasn't a P. & O. port. He saw perfectly that the next stop would be. If I had had him alone, I could have amused him. Dorrien was the sort that finds an absorbing interest in native —eh—customs, and that sort of thing. But his wife naturally didn't care about—sociology. She wandered around under the teaks and tamarinds, waiting for his last shadow of an excuse to fade out utterly. When he couldn't chuck the bluff any more, she'd have him, and she knew it. She'd march him home.

"I myself didn't quite know at first why Dorrien wanted to stay out there. One would have to have more general curiosity than the Dorriens appeared to, in order to find Soerabaya interesting. I knew that if his wife weren't along, he'd drag me into every kind of native dive; but I knew, too, that he hadn't come for the dives. He didn't seem to be very much in love with the place. Who could be? He swore at everything, beginning with the monkeys and ending with the prices. He just didn't want to go home

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—as if he knew he'd be put to bed in the dark and have to go to sleep, when he got there. Queer guy! You remember how big he was? He had a trick of looking round any room as if it were too small for him. And that voice of his, with never a modulation, and those red-brown eyes that seemed to take in everything and give back no comment? Then, one night, I thought I had struck it. He came across to my corner of porch about midnight.

"'My wife's gone to bed, and I think she's gone to sleep,' he said. 'There's no sleep in me, and I shall swear at the lizards if I turn in. I should wake her. You know what these fool partitions are. Let's talk. You never have anything to do.' It wasn't very polite, but it was quite true. I haven't anything to do except see what things are like. When I've made an exhaustive study of all the degrees of civilization, I'm going home to vote. I don't see that, until then, I'm equipped to.

"'All right,' I said. 'I never sleep, I never write letters, and I never criticize. Go ahead.'

"Odd thing: that happened to be just what he wanted—to 'go ahead' indefinitely. I learned a lot

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of things about Dorrien that night. I made out from his talk that he must have mucked around a good deal with tuberculosis at home, but he'd dropped it. He told me some queer things about tuberculosis germs, but he had got tired of it. Exotic diseases were more in his line. He asked the most extraordinary number of questions about beri-beri and things like that. I never quite understood it all; but I think the commonness of tuberculosis bored him. The antipodes take men's imaginations in different ways—who should know if I don't?—and they had simply taken his, across all the world, by their physical malignancies. He didn't give a copper cash for what you folk call psychology, but his brown eyes used to rake the meanest little streets in Soerabaya for any sign of disease. It might have been unpleasant if he hadn't been such a loud-voiced, businesslike chap. If you ask me, I should say he had come to the East just as a sportsman goes to Africa for big game. There's good hunting in Canada, I'm told, but some people want to hunt hippopotami just because hippopotami have such queer complexions. Dorrien could get interested in what

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the human body is capable of, regardless of unpleasantness. But he could as well have stayed at home and stuck to cancer, if he had wanted mere unpleasantness.

"'The only thing I know anything about is leprosy,' he said, that night, after a lot of queer talk. I very seldom argue; I just smoke and wait. You've *got* to assume that people know their own business best. Dorrien had run down to Molokai while his wife stayed in Honolulu. I've never been there myself. He told me a lot about it that same night. He wasn't romantic *pour deux sous*, Dorrien wasn't; but he talked about it as if his heart were in it. I remember an old missionary chap who went on in the same way about the Fijis. Not that Dorrien held with the missionaries; but they both spoke with passion—as if sin and disease could draw men like lovers, panting with blind desire, sheer across the planet, just to help, and then die. Men will go out and overturn the stew-pots, and preach vegetarianism to cannibals, and go into the stew-pot themselves in the end, who couldn't stand a week of Salvation Army slum-work. Dorrien was something

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like that, only with the idealism left out. He seemed all passionate perception, like a child. Yet somewhere in him was that thin little adamantine streak of pure intellectualism. If it hadn't been there, he'd never have held together at all: there *must* have been something inflexible for all that clay to mass itself upon. And so he somehow cared, when it came to leprosy. I suppose, some time or other, the thing had baffled him—tantalized him like an unscrupulous woman.

"It's no use saying, 'Why didn't he love elsewhere?' He happened not to. Meanwhile his wife was taking him home to a fashionable practice which he was sadly endangering by absence. And there were the little girl's teeth, you see. There had been some excuse of a holiday combined with study of special conditions in the Orient, but all excuses had expired. He was facing a P. & O. boat, and he was just sparring for time. It was all rather a mess, as I had learned by three in the morning. But it distinctly wasn't a mess that an outsider had anything to do with. To tell the truth, if Mrs. Dorrien hadn't seemed such a good sport, I'd have had more faith

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in him; but who can ever tell? He left me finally and went to bed, and the next day Mrs. Dorrien went into the town to look up steamer connections while he made up sleep. At least, that was the account she gave.

"I went off into the interior for a few days; pretended I was going to look up a lot of ruins that, of course, I'd seen before—tombs of Arab priests and such. The hotel had got on my nerves, and the suburbs, full of Europeans, were even less what I was looking for. Besides, the Dorriens weren't my affair; yet Dorrien was beginning to clutch me as if they were. I wouldn't run away from any solitary creature, either man or woman—and I've been in some strange galleys, too—but when it comes to man and wife, '*ruf' nicht die Polizei,*' as the Germans have it. The Dorriens looked to me pretty near the breaking-point. I hoped they would either leave or have it out before I got back. When I got away, I forgot about it. I'm foot-loose, and nobody's business is really mine. Fancy being responsible to and for a white-and-gold creature like Mrs. Dorrien! The very thought of it makes you want to take ship.

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"That particular interior wasn't much good—eternal rice-fields, and little villages, one just like another, full of little people. The vegetation was something you couldn't dream, even on hashish, but I'm dead used to vegetation. I nosed around for a few days, and then decided to quit the island entirely. I had engagements elsewhere, if I chose to think so. Anyhow, I wanted something doing. So I went back to Soerabaya. You get boats from there all over.

"They said at the hotel that the Dorriens were leaving the next day. I didn't look them up; but when I came down to dinner, Mrs. Dorrien was in her place, waiting for her husband. She beckoned to me and smiled, and I had to go over, though she looked more like a Frenchwoman than ever, and I was more a sweep than usual. I had to go; but I went thinking what a damn subtle thing marriage is at home, and how glad I was to be single. There are other sides to it, of course; but that's the permanent one. Think of being married to a woman who would dress like that for an undercooked, half-caste dinner in a steaming Soerabaya hotel! Think, that

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is, of what she must be like at close range. She made me sit down.

"'We are leaving to-morrow, Mr. Hoyting.'

"'Sorry.' I couldn't screw out more.

"'Yes. We've had our mail. We have to go.' She straightened her shoulders and swept the room with a bored look, as if it were a ballroom full of men who danced badly. I didn't know whether she was lying about the mail or not. I never get letters, thank God! I haven't any address. What was certain was that I did not want her to tell me what was in their mail. I sidestepped.

"'I don't suppose Soerabaya will soon see the like of that dress again, Mrs. Dorrien.' It *was* the most civilized thing I'd seen in a long time, though of course I don't frequent table d'hôtes in most places. Anyhow, you know how colonial Dutch women get themselves up. 'Aren't you afraid the lizards will spoil it?'

"'This rag?' The 'rag' was gold-colored, as she was, and her laugh clinked like gold. 'I shall give it to the stewardess if she is half decent to me. We shall have to stop in Paris on the way back. I haven't

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had so much as a new *sarong* since we left America. My clothes are faded, tattered, fly-blown, tarnished with the sea.' She shrugged her shoulders. 'Is it really so long since you've seen a well-dressed woman? Surely in India—' That was the best she could do for badinage, and she looked uneasily towards the door as she spoke.

"Suddenly Dorrien appeared in the door. She was silent through our greetings, though I thought she watched him. Whatever it was would break before morning, if it wasn't already at that instant giving way. They hadn't many hours' grace, those two. Why the devil hadn't I stayed in some undiscoverable, soaking little basket-hovel in the nearest village until the next morning? I didn't know the people, I didn't like them; but both of them would cling to me because I was white and because they couldn't agree about anything in the world. I've always wished I had stayed away twenty-four hours more, that time—always. There was no reason under high heaven why I should be in it. And they were nice people, mind you; and neither one of them meant to be a cad. Why, there was nothing either one of

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them wanted that wasn't perfectly decent and desirable in itself. They only wanted different things for each other, with the best conscience in the world. And people go on marrying, every day!

"'I hear you're going, Dorrien.' There was no use in trying to be irrelevant. They would have turned any remark into a comment on themselves.

"'Did Agatha tell you so?'

"'Yes. And D'Acunha mentioned it when I got in.'

"'There's a P. & O. boat from Singapore next week Thursday.' She looked straight at him.

"'There's a Royal Dutch Mail from Batavia next week Saturday,' he flung back.

"She drew a scarf round her shoulders, despite the steaming heat. 'Who wants to go to Rotterdam? If we're going, let's go sanely.'

"'We can't go sanely.' And Dorrien was white beneath his sunburn as he said it.

"Some other people came in, and I didn't scruple to talk to them. If the Dorriens were going to break, I, out of sheer patriotism, didn't want them to break before a public like that. Perhaps I still had some hope of getting away. I've forgotten about that, but

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it seems reasonable. I do remember that I staved it off until after dinner. But they didn't let me alone. They wanted a referee, I imagine; some one who would keep them from screaming insults at each other, or decide between them when they did.

"There's something morally disintegrating about heat. I fancy that's been said before, but I know how true it is. My own nerves were on edge with it. Why didn't they go up into the mountains somewhere and dance with Dutch residents, instead of sticking to ports? But I suppose that would only have postponed the catastrophe. Anyhow, it couldn't hurt either of them to get out of that rotten temperature, no matter where they went. She was whiter than chalk, and Dorrien was nervous as a cat. Her voice jangled, and he twitched all over when she spoke. I didn't see that there was a penny to choose between them for merit, except that she was stronger than he. They'd both break, but he'd break half a minute sooner. Ugh! it was bad!"

Hoyting breathed in the wind that blew gently against us off the Mediterranean waves. "You don't know anything about heat. Dry heat doesn't mat-

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ter. When there's nothing but steam to breathe—everything hot and vaporous and reeking—temperate people lose their poise. Soerabaya was like holding your head over a teakettle. Yes, I was sorriest for Dorrien. But why didn't they go to the mountains and have it out, if they had to, in paradise?"

He was silent for some moments over his vermouth. I didn't interrupt. I knew the rest would come. Uneasy reminiscence of the kind then wrinkling his face would only expedite his narrative. When he began again, it was abruptly, with a change of tone; but his eyes had never moved from the harbor lights.

"I was sorriest for Dorrien. I asked him over to smoke on my porch. Your porch is your sitting-room, you know, and you don't go inside until you have to. I said, 'Let's throw bananas to the monkeys.' The heat had gone to my head a little, too—heat and annoyance. He moved off at once. 'All right,' he said. 'Can't I come and throw bananas to the monkeys?' said Mrs. Dorrien. 'Of course.' We were all unnaturally serious, you see—a bad sign. I was in it, then, for as long as they chose to stay. What fool invented hospitality, I wonder?

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"Dorrien had a little sense left. He began at once. 'I've got a case of conscience to put to you, Hoyting.' Even then I hoped I could stave it off.

"'Conscience is a local matter,' I answered; 'territoriality of law. Don't appeal to me. I'm an outsider.'

"'Aren't we all in Soerabaya together?' Her voice rasped its way in.

"'Yes; but I hope you don't mean to decide anything according to Soerabaya.'

"'Do you really think at the moment we're capable of doing otherwise?' She had me there: it was the mean truth. We weren't. That reeking heat would decide for us. I don't think she had meant him to appeal to me, but I fancy she didn't mind. If he hadn't done it, she would have. It was inevitable.

"Dorrien went on: 'I had a letter when the mails came in two days ago, offering me a big post. Agatha and I don't agree about it.'

"'You don't think it big enough?' I was so relieved that I thought I could speak lightly—Heaven forgive my folly! If it was just some little feud of

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their ambitions, they'd be all right as soon as they were off the land. But her face didn't relax.

"'He has been offered the chance of exiling himself on Molokai with eight hundred lepers.' She had brought the jangling tones into a kind of ironic gamut. '*That* is the kingdom he is offered. And he thinks—my God! he wants to go!' She broke down utterly and wept, great sobs, like a man's, coming up from her chest and shaking her frail body. Women don't usually cry that way; there's trouble in it when they do.

"'But he isn't going.' It was only decent to comfort her. 'You say you are sailing for Europe.'

"Dorrien did not speak. Her sobs slowed gradually. She was making a terrible effort for the power to speak coherently, to get in her arguments, her pleas, her threats. I suppose I was her last dim substitute for public opinion. She was trying to bring the world to bear on him in Soerabaya, and there was only I to be the world.

"Now, how could I have known I was going to run into a thing like that, out there on the other edge of Java? Do I look like Mrs. Grundy? She

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hated me, mind you; she was terribly afraid of me; she couldn't a bit trust me to see the thing her way; but there was no one else. I was an American, and I had had the bad luck to know Dorrien long before. She wasn't trying any feminine wiles; she was just pleading for civilization, as she understood it, against mad and monstrous ideas that she hadn't dreamed existed, except inaccessibly. Caste goes deeper than sex—among us, anyhow. I don't know what she thought about Dorrien, really. Probably he merely seemed to her, for the moment, to have obliterated deliberately all his caste-marks. I've always held that, if a man did the work, it wasn't up to the woman to tell him how to do it; and I remembered how Dorrien had felt about leprosy. Probably he could do good work there. I fancied he knew what he wanted. Some one had to be at Molokai; why, or why not, Dorrien?

"I looked at him. He was sitting perfectly straight and uncomfortable, his mad eyes fixed, as if they were glass, on the palm-boughs out beyond the smoky porch-lamp. Nothing to be done there. And when I turned back to her, I simply—oh, abomi-

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nably, I grant you—laughed aloud. The notion of expecting a woman like that to live on a leper island! It had been bad enough to see her in Soerabaya. I was sorry, fundamentally and genuinely sorry, for Dorrien; but it ought to have been patent even to him that Mrs. Dorrien couldn't go to Molokai. Nothing but an exclusive love, the kind we've all heard about and never experienced, would have made her do it. She and Dorrien had nothing of that sort to go upon, I was absolutely sure.

"'But you're sailing.' I clung to Dorrien's explicit words.

"'By Heaven, I'm not!' His lips just moved. He looked like a statue conceived in madness, carved with scorn.

"'I grant some one has to go'—she was apparently trying to be extraordinarily generous—'but why he? It's not his place or his life. It's not what he's fit for. It's not asked of him. He has me; he has Virginia. Virginia!' She had turned to me, her shoulder blotting out Dorrien. It seemed that they had to communicate through me; they had ceased to address each other. 'Has he a right,' she went

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on, 'to take us to a place like that? Has a husband, a father, no responsibilities? Even if I don't matter, must Virginia live and die among those monsters?'

"How could I say, I ask you, that Virginia must? I had never seen Virginia. I had nothing to do with these people. Why didn't they see that? I don't believe, you know, that they ever saw it. I might have been Rhadamanthus in a poor disguise.

"Mrs. Dorrien stopped, and cried quietly into her handkerchief. Her husband took up the talk.

"'God knows I've wasted life long enough. It's a chance in a million, man—the one chance in the whole world. Give me ten years there, and I'll *know*, I tell you. I'll find a cure. I'll track the filthy germ. I've never had half a show, pulling old ladies through bronchitis. It's no work for a man. I've been ashamed to look at myself in a glass for two years. I've gone a little way; I swear I'm on the right track. It's the kind of thing I can do. I haven't a bedside manner; Agatha has that. Those poor wretches don't need a bedside manner. They need some one to avenge them. She's ambitious.

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Well, let her give me my head for ten years, and she can cover herself with my medals. We'll come back, when I've done my work, and she can queen it all over Europe.'

"He was incoherent, overweening, inconsequent, but terrifyingly in earnest. More probably than not, she would have a suicide on her hands, I thought, if she did take him home. It didn't look as if she would get him past Suez.

"Mrs. Dorrien sat with her hands folded in her lap, breathing hard, but quite silent. They were appalling, that pair. I'd have given a good deal to hear a little repartee just then. But the mortal insult would have been to suggest that either one should speak to the other. The queerest night I ever spent, and I've been through some I didn't believe in, myself, the next day. Well, all I wanted was to have it over; I didn't care how brutally I hastened it.

"'Why don't you go alone?'

"He looked at me then; he had only spoken to me before. Dominated by that look, I began to piece together my own scraps of traveller's knowledge. Then I kicked myself. I didn't need all the unphrase-

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able explanations that gathered silently in his eyes. I knew, of course, what he just refrained from replying. It was the last leash on him—the thinnest thread of control. If that snapped, if I jerked it, we should be saying, all three of us together, monstrous things. I held hard on the leash.

"'He can't go alone.' Her voice was just a whisper. She was shocked to the core of her, and I saw that, to that extent at least, they had had it out. I was sorry for her then—sorry without regard to my fast-ebbing admiration. She had been flung on the horns of a dilemma, and they were goring her cruelly. They couldn't, poor devils, get peace with honor."

Hoyting ordered more vermouth, and lighted the next of the undiminishing procession of cigarettes. He wandered away from the actual story for a little, and I let him, knowing that in the end he would get his fox and goose and bag of corn all safe across, like the man in the riddle.

"Dorrien wasn't the sort of man you'd expect to find in scientific research. He was too human, too impressionable. A scientist oughtn't to notice Javanese singing girls. They ought to be to him as the

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female of the flounder. I don't mean for a minute that Dorrien was a cad, that he was anything but —complete. He was a scientist of sorts, at least by predilection; but he was also healthy and immensely masculine. He couldn't personify Science and then treat her as if she were really a woman. He knew the difference. I've seen men who didn't. They are the lucky ones. Dorrien was unlucky: he had no end of conflicting desires. He wanted abnormal conditions *plus* a normal life; and he wanted a little fame thrown in. I dare say he also wanted Mrs. Dorrien and the little girl whose teeth had to be straightened. Just at that moment, he thought he wanted more than all the rest a chance to do his appointed work. But he was honest, damn him! honest. He knew that Science could never, for him, be a mistress, and he wasn't a man to exist on merely Platonic relations. I've always admired him for not blinking facts when he must have been sorely tempted to. But what they must have gone through, of bitter exposition, those two, in the days of my absence! I didn't see any way out of it. He wanted incompatible goods. And so, by heavens! did she."

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Hoyting dropped his chin on his chest and closed his eyes wearily for a moment.

"If she had been a different sort, even, they might have pulled through. But look at it. She was ambitious and sentimental. She wanted his success. She'd have been willing enough to send him out alone if he had lied to her about possibilities. He had had the honesty to realize them, and the utter brutality to tell her—that was perfectly clear from the state of both of them. Probably he didn't think he had a right to withhold the information from her; or he might have thought it would be a clinching argument for her going with him. If you ask me, I think she was very near hating him for having enlightened her as to the dangers. Women of her kind don't like such assumptions. And it didn't give her a *beau rôle*. There wasn't anything, and wouldn't be, God knows, for her to be jealous of. But there was everything prospectively, if he went, to pity him for. A wife couldn't fling him into that; not when he wouldn't even pose, not when he didn't scruple to say what she was flinging him into. However much she may have wanted to say 'Go,' she

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couldn't. If he had only pretended to be other than he was, she could have made it out to herself that both of them were martyrs, he to his work, she to —oh, well, to the little girl. She was the kind of woman who could condone an infidelity, I imagine, in a cold, superior way; but her principles would hardly permit her to face it beforehand. And that wasn't all—that wasn't all. Of course she had asked him first of all—she would have—about the danger of infection; and it was evident from every suffering line in both their faces that he hadn't hesitated to dot his i's. She knew what was dangerous and what was not, and she knew that if Dorrien went alone he was lost. I pitied her. She had hunted, during two days, for a *beau rôle*, and she couldn't find one. Her only hope was to get him home and trust that he would get over it, like some kind of fit. And he wouldn't; that was clear. The only suggestion I could think of was that they should divorce, and that he should proceed to find another woman who adored him, and take her out there. That isn't the kind of suggestion you make to people; it doesn't sound sympathetic. It isn't prac-

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tical, either; it leaves too much to be done too quickly. Moreover, it had almost certainly never occurred to either of them that they didn't love each other as much as any other two people did.

"And they expected me to say something! They had spent forty-eight hours trying, quite in vain, to find a way out, and then had the appalling cheek and the pathetic confidence to bring it to me!

"'I can't argue this matter,' I said finally. 'You must see that.'

"They didn't see it. It was a perfectly impersonal clutch they were strangling me with. They hadn't any notion of their own dismaying breach of reticence. We were all in Soerabaya—which was hell—together; and conventions didn't exist. Also, I couldn't any more get out of it than if we had been more literally in Hell and they ineluctable and imperishable shades. I had to go on.

"'She won't go,' I said at last to Dorrien. 'And you absolutely can't go alone?'

"He didn't speak, but he turned his eyes on me again. I seemed to read in them that the question had been put to him before, and that he would not

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again go through the agony of answering. Not that the answer in those silent eyes wasn't clear. Then, after a little, he did speak. 'Ask her if she counsels me to go alone.'

"My very spirit revolted at the way they had laid hands on me. Anything I said was bound to be damnable for one or the other of them. I swore I'd get out of the thing non-partisan if I insulted them both.

"'I won't ask her,' I said. 'I won't have anything more to do with it. It's a devilish mess, and one of you has to go under. But I won't lift a finger to determine which one. You may take that from me straight, both of you.'

"We ought by rights to have been tearing about that porch dramatically; but we all sat perfectly still in sheer exhaustion, dripping with sweat and breathing in quiet, regular pants. I wish—I wish it had never been.

"'You won't even tell him that he can't go at all? Such a simple thing as that?' She flung out her hands in a queer, uncertain way. She was very far gone.

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"'I won't tell him anything. Good night.' I pulled myself out of my chair and leaned over the railing. I don't know how long I looked down into the hot little garden. I didn't mean to be a beast. Were you ever in a place where you couldn't stir a muscle without committing murder? No, I suppose not. Well, that's what I felt like. It seemed inevitable that pretty soon they'd trap me into saying something that sounded like advice; and it looked to me as if any advice, once followed, would be fatal. There wasn't any right way out, they being what they were. It was up to whatever Power had made them. It was absolutely *not* up to me. I began counting lizards on the railing. Every bone in my body ached with stiffness when I finally turned round. They had gone."

Hoyting lighted a cigarette. He had finished it, and lighted another, before he spoke again.

"The next morning I got off on a filthy little tramp steamer at four o'clock. It wasn't a steamer the Dorriens could possibly take. I don't think they would even have known about it. Then I made straight for China; I was pretty sure neither one of

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them would think of China. And by that time I had got back nerve enough to be quite sure that I had done right in keeping my hands off. But—I never asked any one what became of them. Now you say you know."

"Oh, yes, I know. Dorrien's dead."

"They went back?"

"Yes, they went back. That was eight years ago?"

Hoyting began to count up the continents on his fingers. "Australia last year—South America—Siberia—the Transvaal, before that. Yes, it would have been eight years ago."

To my surprise, I found myself reluctant to bring out the truth. Hoyting, as he talked, had been so vividly aware of the Dorriens, had made it so evident how real to him and repellent was that remembered scene, that my hesitation was not unnatural.

"He practised at home for a number of years, doing some research when he had time. He went back into public work to some extent—boards and commissions again. Her family seemed to manage him entirely." Then I stopped.

Hoyting waited. The lights in the harbor began

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to lessen, great patches of shadow spacing them. I waited, too, to gather strength. It had all become horrible to me now, and permeated with the sordidness that spoils tragedy.

"He shot himself."

"He cared so much as that?" Hoyting's huge finger flicked off the cigarette ash before there was need.

"He had—oh, I only heard it, Hoyting!" I cried. "I don't know the whole of it. Who does? But those damned Hewells took it up—I suppose by way of condoning the suicide—and made a martyr of him."

"Go on."

"He had somehow in the laboratory—you know the danger; and Dorrien was a reckless chap, those last years, not like himself, his friends said. They all used to worry over his riding, his shooting, his yachting—everything."

I broke off. It was extremely hard to tell the man who apparently knew most about Dorrien, even though he had never called Dorrien friend. "He had somehow, through a cut, the slip of an instrument—I don't know the sickening scientific detail

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of it—inoculated himself with a disease he was working with. He made nothing of it at the time, I'm told. Everybody had forgotten it. Suddenly—when he found out what he was in for, I suppose—he shot himself. After what you've told me, I should say it was probably from disgust. Why blame him?"

"What was it?" Hoyting had not stirred, but his voice had changed immeasurably.

"Tuberculosis."

The great shoulders shrugged once. I felt impelled to explain—a miserable little feverish strut. And before Hoyting, of all men!

"It gives the measure of his revolt—a man who had cured so many, and could have cured himself mechanically, you might say; a man whose special business in life had been to snap his fingers at that particular plague. That's why, until you told me all this, I never understood. Now it's clear enough."

I shut my eyes, glad to put the ironic thing away, glad to be at peace, with no further need to speak of it. When I opened them again, I was alone. Hoyting, the foot-loose, was gone.

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THE CASE OF PARAMORE

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THE CASE OF PARAMORE

FOR the sake of moral values I ought to wish, I suppose, that Paramore had been a more conspicuous figure. There is moral significance in the true tale of Paramore—the tale which has been left to me in trust by Hoyting. I cursed Hoyting when he did it; for Paramore's reputation was nothing to me, and what Paramore knew or didn't know was in my eyes unspeakably unimportant. I wish it clearly understood, you see, that if Paramore deliberately confused exogamy and endogamy in the Australian bush, it doesn't in the least matter to me. Paramore is only a symbol. As a symbol, I am compelled to feel him important. That is why I wish that his name were ringing in the ears and vibrating on the lips of all of you. His bad anthropology doesn't matter—a dozen big people are delightedly setting that straight—but the adventure of his soul immensely does. Rightly read, it's as

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sound as a homily and as dramatic as Euripides. The commonest field may be chosen by opposing generals to be decisive; and in a day history is born where before only the quiet wheat has sprung. Paramore is like that. The hostile forces converged by chance upon his breast.

I have implied that Paramore was never conspicuous. That is to be more merciful than just. The general public cares no more, I suppose, than I do about the marriage customs of Australian aborigines. But nowadays the general public has in pay, as it were, an army of scientists in every field. We all expect to be told in our daily papers of their most important victories, and have a comfortable feeling that we, as the age, are subsidizing research. By the same token, if they deceive us, we—the age—are personally injured and fall to "muck-raking." It is typical that no one had been much interested in Paramore until he was discredited, and that then, quite without intelligible documents, we all began to despise him. The situation, for that matter, was not without elements of humor. The facts, as I and the general public knew them, were these—before

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Hoyting, with his damnable inside information, came into it.

Paramore sprang one day, full-armed, from some special academic obscurity. He had scraped together enough money to bury himself in the Australian bush and grapple face to face with primitive religion in its most concrete form. Each to his taste; and I dare say some casual newspaper readers wished him godspeed. There followed the proper interval of time; then an emaciated Paramore suddenly emerging, laden with note-books; then the published volume, very striking and revolutionary, a treasure-house of authentic and indecent anecdote. He could write, too, which was part of his evil fate; so that a great many people read him. That, however, was not Paramore's fault. His heart, I believe, was in Great Russell Street, where the Royal Anthropologists have power to accept or reject. He probably wanted the alphabet picturesquely arranged after his name. At all events, he got it in large measure. You see, his evidence completely upset a lot of hard-won theories about mother-right and group-marriage; and he didn't hesitate to contra-

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dict the very greatest. He actually made a few people speak lightly of *The Golden Bough*. No scientist had ever spent so long at primitive man's very hearth as Paramore had. It was a tremendous achievement. He had data that must have been more dangerous to collect than the official conversation of nihilists. It was his daring that won him the momentary admiration of the public to which exogamy is a ludicrously unimportant noun. Very soon, of course, every one forgot.

It was not more than two years after his book was printed that the newspapers took him up again. Most of them appended to the despatch a brief biography of Paramore. No biographies were needed in Great Russell Street. This was the point where the comic spirit decided to meddle. A few Germans had always been protesting at inconsistencies in Paramore's book, and no one had paid any attention to them. There is always a learned German protesting somewhere. The general attitude among the great was: any one may challenge or improve Paramore's conclusions—in fact, it's going to be our delightful task for ten years to get more

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out of Paramore than he can get out of himself—but do get down on your knees before the immense amount of material he has taken the almost fatal trouble to collect for us. No other European was in a position to discredit Paramore. It took an Australian planter to do that. Whitaker was his quite accidentally notorious name. The comic spirit pushed him on a North German Lloyder at Melbourne, to spend a few happy months in London. It was perfectly natural that people who talked to him at all should mention Paramore. The unnatural thing was that he knew all about Paramore. He didn't tell all he knew—as I learned afterward—but he told at least enough to prove that Paramore hadn't spent so much time in the bush as would have been absolutely necessary to compile one-quarter of his note-books. Whitaker was sufficiently reticent about what Paramore had been doing most of the time; but he knew for a fact, and took a sporting interest in proving it, that Paramore had never been west of the Musgrave Range. That in itself sufficed to ruin Paramore. It was perfectly easy, then, for the little chorus from Bonn,

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Heidelberg, etc., to prove in their meticulous way that both his cribbing and lying (his whole treatment of Spencer and Gillen was positively artistic) had all been mere dust-throwing. Of course, what Paramore really had achieved ceased from that moment to count. He had blasphemed; and the holy inquisition of science would do the rest. It all took a certain amount of time, but that was the net result.

Paramore made no defence, oddly enough. Some kind people arranged an accidental encounter between him and Whitaker. The comic spirit was hostess, and the newspapers described it. It gave the cartoonists a happy week. Then an international complication intervened, and the next thing the newspapers found time to say about him was that he had gone to the Upper Niger, still on folk-lore bent. That fact would have been stupendous if it hadn't been so unimportant. Two years later, the fickle press returned to him just long enough to say that he had died. I certainly thought then that we had heard the last of him. But the comic spirit had laid her inexorable finger on Hoyting. And suddenly,

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as if in retribution for my spasmodic interest in Paramore's beautiful fraud, Hoyting sent for me.

I went to one of the rue de Rivoli hotels and met him by appointment. Of course, he hadn't told me what it was about. Hoyting never writes; and he puts as little into a telegram as a frugal old maid. Any sign from Hoyting, however, would have sufficed to bring me to Paris; and I stayed in my hotel, never budging even for the Salon, so close at hand, until Hoyting appeared in my sitting-room.

I asked Hoyting no questions. I hadn't an idea of what he wanted. It might, given Hoyting, be anything. He began without preliminaries—except looking frightfully tired. That, for Hoyting, was a rather appalling preliminary.

"Three months ago I was in Dakar. I don't know just why I had drifted to Sénégal, except that I've come to feel that if there must be colonial governments they had better be French. If there was any special thing that pushed me, I've forgotten it.

"They were decentish people, those French officers and their wives. A little stiff always, never expatriated, never quite at ease in their African inn,

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but not half so likely to go *fantee* as the romantic Briton. And once a fortnight the little boats from Bordeaux would come in, bringing more of them. I rather liked them; but, even so, there wasn't any particular reason for my staying so long in Dakar. I hung on like an alarm that has been set. I couldn't go off—or on—until the moment I was set for. I don't suppose the alarm-clock knows until the vibration begins within it. Something kept me there in that dull, glaring, little official town, with its dry dock and torpedo basin, which, of course, they had managed to endow with the flavor of provincial France. They do that everywhere—you'll have noticed?

"I used to go up sometimes in the comparative cool of the evening to dine with the Fathers. It isn't that I hold with them much—Rome was introduced to me in my childhood as the Scarlet Woman—but all travellers have the same tale to tell. They are incomparable missionaries. And it stands to reason that they can get on better with savages than the rest of you. You can meet magic only with magic. It was they who introduced me to Paramore."

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"Oh, it's Paramore!" I exclaimed. "Heaven forgive you, Hoyting, you are always in at the death. How do you manage it? But fancy being in at Paramore's! By the way, I suppose you know that no one knows anything except that he's dead."

"Umph! Well, I do," returned Hoyting. "That's what I was set for—like the clock: to turn up at the Mission House just when he was brought in there with fever. I don't go hunting for things like that, you understand. I'd as soon have thought of staying on for Madame Pothier's *beaux yeux*."

"I didn't know you knew whether eyes were fine or not."

"I suppose I don't. But I can guess. There are always other people to tell you. Anyhow, her fine eyes were all for *le bon Dieu* and Pothier. She was a good sort—married out of a little provincial convent-school to a man twice her age, and taking ship within a month for Sénégal. She loved him—for his scars, probably, Desdemona-fashion. Have you ever noticed that a woman often likes a man better for a crooked white seam across his face that spoils all the modelling? Naïve notions women have about

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war! They tiptoe round the carnage, making eyes at the slayers. Oh, in imagination, of course. And if they once appreciate how they really feel about it, they begin to gabble about disarmament."

Hoyting fingered the dingy little packet that he had taken out of his pocket and laid on my table. He looked far away out of the window for a moment, narrowing his eyes as if trying to focus them on another hemisphere.

"So he was taken to the Pothiers'."

"You're leaving out a lot," I interrupted. "Why 'so,' and why to the Pothiers? You said to the Mission."

"Oh"— His brows knitted. He didn't like filling up his own gaps. The things Hoyting takes it for granted one will know about his exotic context! "The Mission was full of patients—an epidemic had been running through the converts, and it was up to them to prove that the sacrament of baptism wasn't some deadly process of inoculation. As I say, it's all magic, white or black. Poor Paramore wasn't a convert—he was by way of being an agnostic, I imagine—and the Fathers weren't, in a sense, responsible for him. Yet one must do them the jus-

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tice to say that they'd never have sent him away if they hadn't had a better place to send him to. The Mission was no place at the moment for a man with fever—sweating infection as it was, and full of frightened patients who were hiding *gri-gris* under their armpits and looking more than askance at the crucifixes over the doors. The Pothiers had known Paramore two years before, when he had stopped in Dakar on his way into the interior. They took him in quite naturally and simply. Paramore had noticed her fine eyes, I believe—oh, in all honor and loyalty. There were lots of ways in which he wasn't a rotter. He was merely the finest liar in the world—and a bit of a Puritan to boot.

"Is there any combination life hasn't exhausted, I wonder?" Hoyting walked to the window, his hands in his pockets, looking down at the eternal race of the taxicabs below. "Think of what may be going by in any one of those taxis. And Paramore *was* a bit of a Puritan, for all his years of fake anthropology."

His face was heavily weary as presently he turned it to me.

"I was involved in Paramore's case. I've been to

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the bottom of this thing, I tell you. Paramore overflowed—emptied himself like a well; and at the end there was absolutely nothing left in his mind; it was void, up to the black brim. Then he died—quite vacuous. He had simply poured out his inner life around me. I was left alone in Dakar, swimming in the infernal pool of Paramore's cerebrations. You can't, on the banks of the Sénégal, refer a man to his solicitors. If Paramore had been a Catholic, I could have turned his case over to the Bishop. But bishops had nothing to do with Paramore. And that's where you come in."

"Oh, I come in, do I?" I asked a little fearfully. No one wants to come in where Hoyting leaves off.

"Of course. Why else did I make an appointment with you? You'll take this packet when you leave. You don't suppose I'm going to London!"

"I didn't know Paramore."

"No; but I did. And when I've told you, you'll see. I don't take a trip like this for nothing. I hate the very smell of the asphalt."

"Go on." It's what one always says to Hoyting.

"I can't tell it coherently—though I can tell it,

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I suppose, more coherently than he did. In the first place, what do you know about him?"

The question sent a flood of dingy reminiscence welling slowly and muddily up through my consciousness. I thought for a moment. What, after all, was there to tell about Paramore except that he had lied, and that in the end he had been discredited as lavishly as for a time he had been believed? For any one else I might have made a sprightly little story out of the elliptical narrative of the newspapers; but no one that I know of has ever tried to be a *raconteur* for Hoyting. He has use only for the raw material; art disgusts him. I gave him as rapid a *précis* as I could, suppressing all instinct to embroider it.

When I had finished: "He's completely discredited, then?"

I waved my hands. "My dear Hoyting, no one would take Paramore's word about the manners and customs of his own household."

"It's a pity," said Hoyting simply. "It makes it harder for you."

"I've nothing to do with Paramore. If there's

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one thing that interests me less than his disaster, it's his rehabilitation." I didn't mean to be flippant, but Hoyting's ominousness invited it.

"Oh, rehabilitation—no; I dare say, between us, we couldn't manage that. I merely want to get the truth off my hands."

Hoyting lighted another cigarette. The atmosphere of my room was already densely blue, and I opened the window. His hand shot up. "Shut that, please. I can't be interrupted by all those savage noises. God! for a breath of sea air!"

I sat down and faced him. After all, the man has never lived who could stage-manage Hoyting.

"Did you ever meet the Australian?" he asked.

"Whitaker? No."

"A pretty bad lot, I gather."

"Do you mean that he lied?"

"Oh, no. From what Paramore said, I should think that was just the one thing he didn't do."

Hoyting dropped his chin on his breast and narrowed his eyes. Then he shook his head very slowly. "At my time of life it's silly to be always saying how strange things are, and how clever life is, and

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all that literary nonsense; but, on my word, if ever a scene was arranged to make a man a protagonist in spite of himself, this was it. Every element in that Dakar situation was contrived to bring Paramore out. He had fever and the prescience of death—which is often mistaken, but works just as well notwithstanding; he had performed his extraordinary task; he was in love with Madame Pothier. The cup was spilling over, and I was there to wipe up the overflow."

Hoyting was silent for a moment. Then he spoke irritably.

"I don't know where to begin. There isn't any beginning to this story. It hasn't any climax—or else it's all climax. It's just a mess. Well, I shall have to begin, I suppose, if Paramore didn't. Perhaps the first thing was his sitting up in bed one morning and peering out at me through his mosquito-netting. It gave him a queer, caged look. His voice went with it—that cracked and throaty voice they have, you know. 'Do you know Whitaker?' he asked.

"'No, indeed,' I said. 'You'd better lie down.'

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"If you could have seen him then, you'd have felt, as I did, that he'd better not talk; that he wouldn't say anything one wanted to hear.

"'It was Whitaker that finished me.' Still he peered out at me.

"'You're not finished.' I remember lying quite peevishly about it. He so obviously *was* finished.

"'Yes, I am. And Whitaker did it. Oh, I mean I really did it.'

"I give you my word that he was startling, with that unnatural voice, that cunning look in his eyes the sick often get, and those little white cross-bars pressed against his face.

"'Lie down,' I said again. 'What did Whitaker do?'

"He shook his head a little, and the netting moved on his face. It was horrid.

"'He told them I couldn't have done the stuff I'd brought back.'

"'Did he know?'

"'He didn't know anything about folk-lore, but he did know where I'd been.'

"He spoke so impersonally that it led me on to ask questions. After all, I had told Madame Pothier I

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would stay with him through the morning, and I had to make the time go somehow for both of us. It was remittent fever without the chills, and there were fairish mornings at first. The afternoons and nights, when the malady rose like a wave and broke horribly after midnight—oh, those were bad. Madame Pothier and the regimental doctor took care of those. It looked fairly hopeful when he arrived, but finally all the worst symptoms came out, and before the end it was very bad. It was one of those cases that might, at the last, be yellow fever and just technically isn't. Poor Paramore! Did I say that his face looked as old as all time under that shock of sun-bleached hair? It did.

"That questioning was the first of it. It fixed the name of Whitaker in my mind. I thought I'd find out something about him. You never can tell what will comfort a man in that state. But the Pothiers had never heard of him, or the Fathers at the Mission. I only mention those first remarks of Paramore's to show you how I came into it. I had never heard of Paramore himself until that time in Dakar. I never read newspapers. All those good people said Para-

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more was a 'grand savant,' but they seemed a little vague, themselves. The only person who wasn't vague was a lean, old, parchment-colored Father who was waiting for the next boat to take him home. He had been twenty years in the interior, and he was worn out—all except his voice, which was startlingly deep. He said no one could afford to study fetich but a priest. Père Bernard had no respect for anthropologists—thought they took a collector's interest in preserving various primeval forms of sin, I suppose. I didn't care for his mediæval manners, and I went back to Paramore with more sympathy. What a world! I always wondered if Paramore had some time, somewhere at the back of beyond, got him on the raw. Well, we shall never know. And yet I dare say the reverend old gentleman is here in Paris at this very moment. What a world! Nothing in it, according to Père Bernard, that isn't magic—either white or black.

"I can't tell you by what steps Paramore led me to his tragedy. I don't remember those days separately at all. They went in jagged ups and downs—times when he talked, times when he was dumb,

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times when he might be said to rave. Then, too, he brought things out in no order at all. It was as if he lay in a world beyond perspective and expected you to sit outside of Space and Time, too, and see it all whole, as he did. That was rather unpleasant—he had so the manner of being dead and seeing his life from so far off that one thing in it was as near and as real as another. There was absolutely no selection. It was only by recurrence of certain things that you got any stress. And out of it all I managed to get the three main facts: the Royal Anthropological Institute, Whitaker, and the soul of Paramore. Madame Pothier was a close fourth, but she was only an accessory after the fact. That I swear. You believe it?"

I jerked my head up. "Good Heavens, Hoyting, how do I know? You haven't told me anything yet."

He rubbed his hands over his brows and frowned with closed eyes. "No; I beg your pardon. But, as I say, I see the whole thing. It's hard to tell. It never was told to me. And I didn't want you to think it was one of those silly tales of a man's turning hero because he's in love with a woman. If Paramore had asked me to tell Madame Pothier the story I'm tell-

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ing you, I'd have turned on my heel and left him, if he'd been at the death gasp. I swear I would."

Hoyting lighted another cigarette—the world's supply must be inexhaustible!—and seemed to brace his huge body for concentrated effort.

"Well, here it is. Paramore had one passion in life—one double-distilled, quintessentially pure passion—and that passion was anthropology. There never was a stiffer, straighter, more Puritanical devotion to an idea than his. Get that into your head first, if you want to understand."

I could be forgiven, it strikes me, for being sceptical, in the light of that neat *précis* I had compiled from the newspapers. "Oh, come, Hoyting," I said, "science doesn't recruit from liars—not even when they've got Paramore's deuced cheek. You are upset."

One look at Hoyting's gigantic lassitude put me in the wrong. It would take more than Paramore to upset Hoyting. He was perfectly firm, though very much bored. Imagine neurasthenia and Hoyting bunking together! One can't. Hoyting smiled.

"No, it's not nerves. Only you people who want

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everything all of a piece—you irritate me. The point about Paramore is that he combined contradictions. He was magnificently human. And as I am in possession of facts, I ask you to suspend your silly judgment until I've done. If you know anything about me, you know that I don't go in for theories."

I was silent.

"It was the only thing he cared about, I tell you. Nature implants something in every man that kills him in the end. Paramore wanted recognition from a very small, almost undiscernible, group of people whom neither you nor I nor any one else gives a damn for—a few old gentlemen in frock coats and gold eye-glasses who raise their poor, thin old eyebrows over the sins of Paris, but feel a tremulous pleasure in the nastiness of Melanesia. Why did he? Just because he believed they are a sacred sect. He honestly believed that anthropology was important. He thought it was big and real and vital and solemn. He had supreme respect for facts. He put every penny he had or ever hoped to have into going out to acquire them in the bush. The bush isn't nice. The

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climate distressed him, the natives shocked him, the solitudes terrified him. Why did he go? Because he held, quite austerely, the scientific attitude towards data, evidence, material. Those old gentlemen needed more facts to feed their theories with, and Paramore was the boy to get them. When there's neither health nor wealth nor pleasure to be got from doing a thing, a man doesn't do it except for an idea."

"Fame?" I suggested.

"Fame? Well, even if Paramore had told the truth, he wouldn't have had any fame that you'd notice. It was just a pathetic belief in the sanctity of those few old gentlemen who potter round among unclean visions of primitive man. They can't, in the nature of the case, be very numerous. If you want fame, you go for the crowd. He could have done a little fancy exploring if he'd wanted fame. No! Paramore had the superstition."

"What really happened in Australia?"

"The only interesting thing happened inside Paramore. He decided to lie."

"He must have been a bit of a coward. If he

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wanted so desperately to collect those filthy facts, why didn't he collect them?"

"Bad luck—nothing else. He went as far as he could. But he was no seasoned traveller, you know. He just came to grief, as any man might, there in the wilderness. The stars in their courses—and so forth. He didn't get so far west as he had meant to. Men went back on him, maps turned out incorrect, supplies failed awkwardly, everything happened that can happen. Then his interpreter died—his one absolutely trustworthy man—and the whole game was up. He lost his head; he believed his eyes; he believed lying natives. They made game of him, I dare say, in some grim, neolithic way. They said anything and everything about marriage customs—quite different things from group to group. He had bad luck with his own men—half a dozen of them died of dysentery or something—and he had to recruit on the spot. Why on earth should they tell him the truth? It was more fun not to. And, of course, now and then he pushed into some corner where the only use they had for him was to eat him. From those places he had to withdraw speedily. It's not an anthropologist's busi-

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ness to get killed unless he can be sure of getting his note-books home. He's more like a spy, apparently, than a soldier.

"After eight or ten beastly months, despair was reeking round him like a mist. I think he said that, himself. His mind tried to peer out through it. He got nothing but a jumble of reports from those aborigines. Time after time they'd promise to let him in on some rite, and then their faces would be shamelessly blank when he kept his appointment. They said nothing that wasn't carefully contradicted. Certain things he did get hold of, of course. Paramore swore to me that a good bit of his book was true as truth—but not enough to prove anything, to found theories on. About three of the note-books were genuine, but they made nothing coherent, he said. He put everything down, always intending to check and sift later."

I may have looked a little bored, for Hoyting suddenly interrupted his narrative. "I'm telling you all this," he said, "because it's essential that you should know everything you can know about it. The thing's going to be in your hands, and the more information

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you have the better. I'm not dragging you through this biography because I think it's beautiful. I can see you loathe it all. Well . . . if only you stay-at-home people would realize how much luck counts! You don't dream of the mad dance of incalculable forces. What you really hate Paramore for is his having luck against him."

"No," I protested stiffly; "for lying."

"If he had had luck, he wouldn't have lied. He would have been prettier if he had been incapable of lying; but if he hadn't needed to lie, you never would have known that he wasn't as pretty as any one else. You're quite right, of course. I'm not asking you to love Paramore, but I advise you to understand him as well as you can. You'll find the whole business easier."

"Say what you have made up your mind to say." I couldn't, at the moment, go further than that.

Hoyting swung back, as if there had been no interruption, as if I had been pleading with him not to stop.

"One day, when the despair was thickest, he had an idea. He may have been a little off his head, you

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know. . . . He wouldn't confess his failure at all. He would let his imagination play over those notebooks; he would supply from his generous brain everything that was needed. A good deal of it was new country, quite aboriginal and nasty, and his learning was sufficient to warn him off ground that had been authentically covered. It was also sufficient to keep him magnificently plausible. He would take his meagre gleanings to some secluded spot, and he would return to England with the completed sheaf. He would squeeze the last drop of significance out of every detail he had learned; and if he were put to it, he would invent. 'No, not invent, exactly,' he corrected himself when he told me. 'I would draw conclusions and parallels; I would state probabilities as facts; and I would put in some—a very few—of the things I suspected but had no proof of. And then I would contradict a few things.'

"Those were his words, describing that ancient intention of his. 'My pen got away with me,' he confessed; 'and the lust of making a beautiful book. There were things that occurred to me—I put them in. Any one who knows any folk-lore can make up

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customs with his eyes shut. After a little, you get to feel that if the beastly creatures didn't do it that way they must be awful fools. And then you get to believe that they did. But I marked everything on the margin of my own manuscript as I wrote it, true or not true, inferred or just invented. That was later—much later—at Whitaker's place.'

"I give you some of his words that I remember, you see. I don't remember much. But that was the gist of his great confession. He had the idea—his one way to snap his fingers at luck. Until he got into the work, he didn't know how his idea would dominate him. He first had the notion of putting just enough alloy into his book to give it body. In the end his idea rode him—and damned him. I'm leaving out a lot, but you can work that out for yourself—how his inspiration would have come, and what would have happened."

"But what about his scientific passion? That has nothing to do with the 'lust of making a beautiful book'—quite the contrary."

"Wait till I've finished. Now comes Eve. *Place aux dames!* . . .

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"Before he had struck out into the fatal west for himself, he had stopped with a planter. The planter's name, of course, was Whitaker. There was a man who had isolated himself, and worked like a navvy, and made good. His history, I suppose, was much like all other local histories. His place, on one of the rivers that flow into Lake Eyre, was a kind of outpost. He was very glad to let Paramore sit on his verandah and talk to him in the evenings. Paramore must have been there six weeks before he finally started on his expedition—if you can call an unsuccessful, hand-made thing that leaked at every pore an expedition. The daughter, Joan Whitaker, was back from school in Melbourne. There was a fiancé of sorts about the place. I don't remember much about him, least of all his name. He was approved by Whitaker. Paramore seems not to have noticed the girl—rather deliberately not to have noticed her, she being another man's property. So Whitaker had no objection to prolonging Paramore's stay. Paramore talked, I feel convinced, as well as he wrote. I saw of him only dregs and delirium, but I made that out. The love affair went on all over the plantation, while

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Whitaker and Paramore sat on the verandah and constituted society. They got on well enough, apparently. Paramore certainly liked Joan Whitaker, but he kept out of the way of the fortunate affair. Remember that; there's no reason to doubt his word. It all came out, bit by bit, in troubled references—mixed up with his symptoms and medicines, and the ebb and flow of the fever.

"But out in the bush, later, the memory of her had grown upon him; I suppose, simply because, though so far away, she was the nearest feminine thing. At the heart of all that despair over the frustrated research, was an irrelevant sentimental regret that he shouldn't be able to make love to her if he ever saw her again. In her flittings about, she had pricked his imagination once or twice—this bright creature that flitted at another man's behest. You can see how it might be; and Paramore up to that time had been heart-whole. Moreover, his exploration was shocking and disgusting to him, as I've said—it was aimless nastiness without even the grace of bolstering up a theory. He didn't love the work for itself, remember; only for its results and what he

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believed its sacred importance. He hated the technique of it. And Joan Whitaker was as different as a Melbourne schooling, and a fair complexion, and the awkwardness of innocence, could make her. She was all the things those unsatisfactory aborigines weren't. I don't think it went deeper than that. She merely served the moment. Any other girl would have done as well. Or, at least, that's my notion.

"Well—you can see the rest from here. He went back with his big, insane idea, leaving despair farther behind him at every step. He struck straight back again to Whitaker's place, and after nuisances and delays and impossible absurd misadventures, he got there. All the time, he carried his idea carefully intact, like a cup filled with precious liquid. He was most anxious to get to some place where he could sit down with pens and ink. He didn't doubt Whitaker would take him in. Everything was to be completed before he sailed for England. The story would have been very different, I'm inclined to think, and Paramore might have been living to this day if the fiancé hadn't turned out a bad lot and been shipped—or if Paramore himself hadn't been a bit of a Puritan.

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"He found Whitaker very much surprised to see him back so long before the date he had set, but only too glad to have him stay; and he also found the girl, no longer flitting about, but brooding on the bough. The rest was inevitable. . . .

"Paramore got to work at once—making love to Joan Whitaker in the intervals, almost from the beginning. Then—mark the nature of the man—he found that the two things he was doing were incompatible. There's no telling whether Joan Whitaker would have objected to his idea, but he seems to have been sure that she would if she knew. His idea rode him—the idea of getting the better of his bad luck. He didn't want to cheat his fellow scientists, who had done him no harm, but he did want to cheat his mean destiny. He personified it like an enemy, I fancy. It must have been an obsession with him. Day by day, he saw better what the book—his revenge—was becoming; and in the end there was no mistaking it for a monstrous, magnificent lie, out of all proportion to what he had first intended. Some men might have managed even so—the men who keep life in water-tight compartments. Not Paramore. He didn't

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see his way to offering Joan Whitaker a liar for a husband. It apparently never occurred to him to put the case before her. There are very few cases you *can* put to a girl of eighteen. And, as I've said, his feeling for her was all reverence and illusion and reversion to type. Any niceish girl would have done the trick for him; and any man would have looked eligible to her smarting conceit. But it was no marriage of true minds—just an affair of circumstance and of innocent senses, riotously collaborating. Madame Pothier—a finished creature—would have been a very different matter. But he had never seen her then. . . .

"Oh, well; you see how it went. He was virtually staking everything on that book, which was virtually writing itself, 'like a damned planchette,' he told me. But he couldn't let her stake anything on it; he couldn't even ask her to. Moreover, it was one of those inconvenient situations where no explanation except the right one is of the slightest use. So he packed up his manuscript and left for some address, that he didn't give, in New South Wales."

"Like that?" I asked. The sudden turns of the thing were beginning to interest me, in spite of my Pharisaism.

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'Oh, there were alarums and excursions, of course. But I had to guess them myself. Paramore's mind had other things to dwell on. You can see it all, though: the girl, who had thought he was drifting towards a proposal; the man, Whitaker, who wanted his daughter settled and happy, and thought Paramore would do—oh, a lot of primitive instincts that we don't recognize until they're baffled; Paramore behaving as well as he knew how, granted his obsession; and they choosing to consider him a blackguard. Nothing violent happened, apparently, but you can understand the zest with which Whitaker probably spoke in London. There was black hate in his truth-telling. I fancy what Paramore had done wouldn't in the least have shocked Whitaker if it had been done by his son-in-law. He didn't mention the girl in that famous interview, and Paramore never knew what had become of her. I don't think he cared. He never saw Whitaker again."

Hoyting rose and walked to the window. The gray eyes looked curiously down on the rue de Rivoli, as if, for charity, he had taken a box at a pageant that bored him.

"This isn't in my line, you know," he said finally,

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turning back—"any of it. Paramore reeked of civilization—Great Russell Street, if you like. Hang civlization! Yet he went down with fever like a sick Kruboy. Well, I must get on with this. I wouldn't stop in Paris another night for anything you could offer me."

He sat down, his big frame shaking the little gilded armchair. But he seemed loath to begin. His gray eyes were closed.

"How did he get to Dakar?"

Hoyting's eyes were still closed as he answered. "That was Paramore trying to wash himself white again. He was discredited, deservedly. He had lied, deliberately and rather long-windedly. No loophole anywhere for excuse. Paramore himself was the last man to find any excuse for it. He never carried a devil's advocate about with him. Doubtless, at home, his own conscience had returned to him, in place of the changeling conscience that had dwelt with him in the wilderness. He knew his reputation was dead and buried with a stake through its heart. But he set himself to atone. Some men, feeling as he did, would have shaved their heads and put on a hair

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shirt. Not Paramore—though he would have saved me a lot of nuisance if he had. No; he wanted to retrieve himself in kind, as you might say. He would spend his life and his few crumbling bits of fortune in *doing* the thing he had pretended to do. He would go to an utterly new field and stay till he'd amassed a treasure—priceless, authentic facts, each an unflawed pearl. That's why he went to the Upper Niger—and here is his treasure."

Hoyting opened his eyes suddenly, bent forward, and tossed the packet across to me.

"There you have it all. He went, he did the incredible thing, and then, quite properly, he died. The rest—the rest is mere drama." He sat back.

I put the packet down. "Do you mean that these are his documents, and that you believe in them? Have you read them?"

"Have I read them? Do I look as if I would read an anthropologist's note-books? Of course, I can see the humor of throwing over Christianity, lock, stock, and barrel, only to spend your life studying totemism—and on top of that, calling it a 'career.' If you think the absurdity of it is lost on me, you're

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quite mistaken. But I would be willing to take my oath before the Last Tribunal that there isn't a false word in that whole pile. Paramore did it—the more honor to him. When it comes to expecting any one else to believe it—I'm not such a fool. But I should think my word might suffice for you."

I shrugged my shoulders.

Hoyting lighted another cigarette, folded his arms on the table, and looked at me. "I knew everything there was to know about Paramore before he died," he affirmed. "I didn't in the least want to know any of it, but it was inevitable. He had no control over his mental muscles—complete paralysis of the reticent nerve, you might say. I know, I tell you. If you don't choose to believe it—you'll have doubted my word, that's all. I have all the evidence there is; and why should I lie about it?"

"Oh, I believe it—but it's extraordinary."

"Should I be here if it weren't extraordinary? It's preposterous. But there it is."

"And the rest, you said, was drama?"

Hoyting looked out. "Let's go to a café," he said; "I want a rest."

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I assented. There is something in the transitoriness of a café crowd that quiets Hoyting. No one can be expected to stay overnight in a café. He likes the restlessness, the ridiculous suggestion that every one else may be as foot-loose as he. Besides, Hoyting is always restive under the strain of a story; he chafes at the bounds and limits of any rounded episode. He needs to draw breath and come back to it, as it were, from very far. So we ordered things; sitting on the very edge of the boulevard, we sipped and watched for an hour. In the end I saw signs of his return to the matter in hand.

"Beauty—" he began suddenly, pushing his glass aside, "it's something I never see. But now and then a man or a woman delights me curiously. Madame Pothier was like that. She showed you what civilization of the older sort can do when it likes. And Paramore saw it, too. He was clean gone on her. He would have told her everything if he had had any right to. I said it wasn't a silly tale of woman's ennobling influence, didn't I? No more it was. Yet he saw her as soon as he reached Africa, and I am sure he carried her image into the interior with him—as

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he once did Joan Whitaker's, only with an immense difference, after all. This time he brought back truth instead of lies. So at least it couldn't have been a bad image to live with.

"I got all this that I've been telling you, in bits and snatches, while I sat with him. The fever didn't seem so bad at first—the doctor thought we could pull him through. You absolutely never know. I never thought he would pull through. Those very first questions of his, when he sat peering out at me through the mosquito-netting of his bed, didn't seem to come from a man who had life before him. And when I had got those early details out of him, I somehow felt sure he'd go. I'm no pessimist; but I didn't see life giving him a second chance. It was too much to hope that life would let him make good after all. And yet—he so nearly did. Damn fever! . . .

"Madame Pothier did everything she could. She was a good sort. I've always wondered, as much as it is permitted to wonder, whether she felt anything for Paramore. If she did, I am sure that she never knew it. There are women like that, you know. I don't mean the women who gaze out of cold, sexless depths at the

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fires burning above, and wonder pruriently why the fires burn. She wasn't that kind. I mean the women who, when they become wives, remain women only for their husbands. I don't believe it would ever have occurred to her that any man save Marcel Pothier could look upon her with romantic interest. I don't pretend to understand the phenomenon, but I know that it exists. A woman like that simply assumes that she is no longer a wandering lure constantly crossing the path of the male. She thinks all men's eyes are veiled because hers are. A very pretty, pathetic ostrich trick. Sometimes it doesn't work, but astonishingly often it does. With Paramore it did. All I mean is that she hadn't dreamed Paramore worshipped her. She remembered him as a friend they had made two years before, and of course he was to come to them out of that pitiful Mission Hospital. No one in Dakar knew anything about Paramore's fiasco. He wasn't precisely famous, you see. Dakar was perfectly provincial. And Paramore was hoping, I dare say, that he could stave off the tale of his lie until he could lay before her the news of his atonement as well. The hardest thing he had to bear, prob-

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ably, was dying and leaving his story to the telling of chance tongues, not knowing in what form it would eventually come to her. That, I am convinced, is why he told me so much—let his parched lips articulate those memories for me. But not once did he break down and ask me to tell her. Oh, I've good reason for respecting Paramore—a second-rate respect it must always be, I dare say, granted that extraordinary crumpling-up in Australia. But he never crumpled up again.

"For a day or two he hung in the balance. Then, after one exceedingly bad night, which left Madame Pothier blue under her fine eyes and white round her carved lips, he had his last coherent hours on earth. . . .

"I shall never forget that morning. Pothier was away on duty. There were only the doctor, Madame Pothier, and I, and one or two frightened servants who wouldn't come near. They thought it was yellow fever. Old Séraphine, Madame Pothier's Auvergnat maid, hovered round in the corridors with a rosary. You could hear the click and shake of it in the still intervals. Once a 'Je vous salue, Marie, pleine de

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grâce,' cut across a delirious whispered oath. The pitiful part of it was that there was nothing to do. We just had to lift him through the agony and weakness as best we could until the coma should set in. There is nothing romantic about coast fever. It attacks you in the most sordid ways—deprives you first of dignity and then of life. Yet poor Paramore's death-bed had a kind of nobility; perhaps because Madame Pothier was there. She was dressed in white and looked as wan and distant and compassionate as a nun. The straight black masses of her hair, arranged in an odd, angular way, looked like some kind of conventual cap. Paramore's eyes followed her about. . . .

"It was that morning he gave me the packet—told me where it was, made me get it out and take formal possession of it before him. Once, when the demon was leaving him a little quiet, he lifted his right hand. 'I swear by—by all I hold sacred' (his eyes were fixed on her, though he was speaking to me) 'that I 'have told nothing there that is not true. All second-hand reports are in a note-book by themselves. It is labelled. Tell Beckwith especially about the Sabbath. Beckwith ought to follow it up. I sat in the hut by

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the sorcerer in his trance and waited for his spirit to come back. When he waked, he said he had delivered my message. He had delivered it. Three days later, the man I had sent for came running into the village. The sorcerer had told him, as he said he would, on the way to the Sabbath. I depose solemnly that the man came. His village was three days away. He had heard a voice at his door the night of the Sabbath—a voice that gave my message, that said it was in haste and could not stay. Very curious. Beckwith ought to know. It's all there; but tell him. Of course, I never could get anything out of the sorcerer about the Sabbath. But Beckwith might put it in a foot-note, if they won't print *me*.' Then the sordid agony again. . . . Madame Pothier and the doctor didn't understand English, by the way, and of course didn't, in any case, understand the situation. They hadn't listened to what I had listened to, all those earlier days. So when the doctor told me fussily that Paramore oughtn't to talk and that death was only a few hours off, I paid no attention. Why shouldn't he talk if death was so near? The only thing I could do for Paramore was to let

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him talk when he had strength. I sat tight and listened."

Hoyting stopped. The lights winked out along the boulevard. Night had fallen with capricious suddenness. I ordered more drinks quietly. Hoyting was breathing hard; tired out, and, as I thought, very weary of it all, longing to slip the leash and be off. The air was cool and soft, and the crowd was thinning a little. People were dining and making ready to "go on." I couldn't have stirred, but that worn packet suddenly felt very heavy in my pocket.

Hoyting began sipping vermouth again. Finally he spoke. "He didn't say a great deal more. The end was too near. But he spoke very clearly when he did speak; and whenever his eyes were open, they were fixed on Madame Pothier. Towards the last he put out his hand to me. I was holding the note-books—I shouldn't have dared put them down so long as he was conscious. 'There is only one woman in the world,' he said, 'and she belongs to Pothier. Look at her.' I didn't look at her, and he went on: 'There may be other women alive, but I can't believe it. Do you believe it?'

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"He wasn't wandering, you know. His mind had merely stripped his situation to its essentials; he was quite alone with the only facts that counted. He had summed life up, and didn't have to keep truce any longer with mortal perspectives. He drew the real things round him like a cloak. . . . Absurd to talk of inconsequence; there was no inconsequence.

"I bent over him. 'I'm not blind, Paramore.'

"'No, but I am—blessedly blind. . . . And some day she'll hate me, you think?'

"His lips were straining to ask me to see to it that she didn't, but he controlled them. That—as much as anything—is why I'm here with you now. It was more than decent of him; it was fine. But, by the same token that he couldn't ask, I couldn't promise—though I saw that another *crise* was near and the doctor was crossing over to the bed.

"'I don't believe she ever will,' I said. 'There's so much she'll never know.'

"I was thinking of his forlorn and beautiful passion for her, which she would have hated him for, because she would always have been afraid it was somehow her fault. Not quite fair when you work it out, but

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those women are like that. I saw in a flash, though —he took his eyes off her and looked at me, just once—that he thought I meant his miserable, discredited past. Then the doctor thrust me aside. The matter was never explained between us.

"There were only one or two more speeches of Paramore's to record. The monosyllables wrung out of his weakness didn't count—except, immensely, for pity. Very likely you know what the fatal fever symptoms are—ugly beyond compare. I won't go into that. We were all pretty nearly done by the time the blessed coma settled over him. He opened his eyes just once more and fixed them on Madame Pothier, who stood at the foot of the bed. All his strength was in his poor eyes: his body was a corpse already. It was to me he spoke, but he looked at her until the lids fell. 'Damn Whitaker! He's a worm; but not such a worm as I.'

"A strange little blur came over his eyes. I turned my head for one instant. Madame Pothier, weeping, was holding up a crucifix. 'I don't believe God knows,' he said. The words came very slowly from far down in his throat. We heard the voice just once

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more. 'Madame!' Then the eyes shut, and the scheduled number of hours followed, during which he was completely unconscious, until he died officially."

Hoyting smoked quietly for a moment. Then he spoke hurriedly, as if he had to complete a report. "We buried him out there. The Pothiers were perfect. She was worn out by the strain of the illness and the nursing, but not more than any one would have been after such an experience. To the last I searched her face to see if she knew. It interested me curiously. I gave her a dozen chances to question me about Paramore. She behaved throughout as one who had no suspicion. She was polite about the notebooks, and asked if they were to be edited, but she evidently didn't in the least understand what he'd been up to. He was a 'grand savant,' she was sure, though Père Bernard thought, perhaps, his powers could have been more fortunately employed. Of course, *ce pauvre monsieur* was not religious, which must be a great regret to his Catholic friends. She believed firmly, however, that the Divine Mercy was infinite and that there were more ways than one of making a good death. They were taking the liberty

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of having some masses said for his soul. Everything was said with the most perfect feeling, the utmost sincerity and gravity. What more *could* a blind woman have said? I haven't a shadow of doubt that, if ever the whole story were forced upon Thérèse Pothier, she would summon her intelligence gallantly and understand it all. Only, what on the face of it was there for her to understand? . . . I rather wish she were dead."

"You wish—" I didn't follow him.

"I'd like to be sure that, since she'll never know the whole truth, she'll never know more than she knew in Dakar. I was sorry for Paramore. He was tempted, and he fell, and he struggled up again and damned temptation to its face. Not a hero, oh, no. But there is something exhilarating in seeing the elements of heroism assemble in a man who is supposed to be a putty of cowardice."

It was late, and, though Hoyting had not yet informed me of what he intended me to do with the packet, I suggested dining. We made our way to a very secluded and unfashionable restaurant, and ate, surrounded by French commercial types. Over

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our liqueurs, I asked him why he had given me the note-books.

"Why did you give me this stuff?"

Hoyting looked surprised. "I can't do anything with it. I don't know that sort of person. Can't you look up the man Beckwith? I never heard of him, but he ought to be easy to find. I could tell all this to you, but I couldn't go over to London and tell it to a court of inquiry. I don't hold you responsible in any way, of course, but something ought to be done. I'm taking the night express to Genoa."

"If you imagine I'm going to drop down from the blue on Sir James Beckwith—" I began.

Hoyting shrugged his shoulders. "You at least know who he is, apparently. That in itself is a sign."

"But no one will read the tragic stuff," I cried. "And yet you place Paramore's reputation in my hands. You *do* make me responsible."

Hoyting looked at me across the table, smiling faintly and shaking his head.

"Didn't I tell you that I don't believe we can rehabilitate him? But we owe it to him to put his papers in the right hands. Beckwith couldn't refuse

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to take them, at least; and then our duty would be done."

I took the "our" without flinching. The tale of Paramore had weighed on me. "I'll do it," I said at last—"but never again, Hoyting."

"Have I ever made such a request before?" he interrupted sharply.

"No, never."

"Then, in God's name, take it!" With his strong hand he made a gesture as if to sweep it all away from him. The liqueur glasses fell with a broken tinkle to the floor. Hoyting bit his lip. "I wouldn't have the things back in my fingers again for anything under heaven. Good-bye."

I started to my feet, but he had reached the door. He had the luck to step into a taxi the next instant with an indescribable farewell gesture.

It was part of Paramore's persistent bad luck—the devil that pursued him was not put off by change of scene—that Sir James Beckwith died before I could make an appointment with him. From all I have heard of him, he certainly was the man to go to. Paramore's note-books were coldly accepted in the

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quarters to which I finally took them; and I have always suspected that if my mien had been less desperate, they would have been politely handed back to me. No faintest echo of their reception has ever come to me, though I have, entirely on their account, subscribed to a dozen learned journals. I do not expect anything to happen, at this late date, in Paramore's favor.

There is little reason to believe that the packet Hoyting cherished will be piously guarded by the hands to which I committed it. And, even if it were, no minor corroborations drifting in after many years could ever reconstitute for Paramore such a fame as he once lost. When I think of the matter at all, it is, curiously enough, to echo Hoyting's wish that Madame Pothier would die. The best thing Paramore's restless ghost can hope for, it seems to me, is that she may never know the very little the public knows about him. Sometimes that silence seems to me more desirable for him than rehabilitation itself. But then, I have never been interested in anthropology.

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